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KING LEAR AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

by

THOMAS MICHAEL CHRISTIAN OLENUK

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "King Lear and the Problem of Evil", submitted by Thomas Michael Christian Olenuk, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's King Lear is a spectacle of pain, suffering, and evil. Criticism, however, usually makes this point only in passing--generally neglecting to give due consideration to the problem of evil in King Lear, or to attempt to suggest a relationship between it and the presence of human suffering in the action of that play. In this thesis, therefore, we shall consider the problem of evil in King Lear, the various resolutions to this dilemma which the play seems to offer, and the relationship of this dilemma to the tragic vision of existence, as it is presented in that play.

King Lear makes an intense effort to examine the enigma of man from every angle and in every aspect. This diverse vision, however, has presented a critical quandary to scholars: with rare exception, they discuss only one aspect of the drama and fail to suggest any ostensible resonance between the other facets of the play, and their own particular aspect of study. Much as we might expect these readings to converge, or to dovetail somehow, this has thus far not been the case, for King Lear embodies more than one dimension of human experience--it continually presents a picture of life from more than one point of view. The format of the thesis, therefore, attempts to adapt itself to the multi-faceted vision of King Lear in order to examine each facet more

concisely and to view the play from as many different angles as possible, within the limits of the investigation.

The major trends in scholarly criticism, which have emerged over the last seventy years of Shakespeare studies, have undoubtedly had the greatest impact on the shape of our present understanding of King Lear. An examination of those critics who have been most influential in this area is consequently fundamental to any investigation of the tragedy involved in that play. The actual crux of Lear's tragedy, however, lies in the ethical conflict embodied in the action of the play, a conflict which is ultimately concerned with the moral constitution of the universal order that presides over the characters of King Lear. For this reason, we must examine the nature of the universal order in respect to the traditions of Christian humanist and naturalist thought which were present in Renaissance England at the time King Lear was composed. The focus of this part of the investigation is the problem of an apparent lack of justice in human affairs, and how this situation subsequently casts doubt on the moral character of the divine order. But ultimately it is the more general problem of evil itself which seems to dominate Lear's speculations, and from which the play's tragic vision of existence seems to emanate. This is Paul Ricoeur's theory of tragedy, and one whose validity must be carefully tested against the action and vision of King Lear. Ultimately, therefore, we must examine how the idea of a "wicked god"--that is, a presiding deity who is somehow

involved in the operations of mundane evil--affects Lear's understanding of the metaphysics of his existence, to what extent the idea of a "wicked god" contributes to human suffering in King Lear, and to what extent a "wicked god" is involved in the tragedy of Shakespeare's King Lear.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Critical Approaches To *King Lear*	1
II	Naturalism in *King Lear*	29
III	The Spectacle of Evil in *King Lear*	65
	Footnotes	96
	Index of Section Glosses	107
	List of Works Cited	110

"Leda and the Swan"

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

--W. B. Yeats--

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO KING LEAR

Scholarly Criticism On 'King Lear' May Be Said To Begin With A.C. Bradley's 'Shakespearean Tragedy', And Although It Contains Many Things With Which Scholars Now Disagree, Its Influence And Importance Cannot Be Ignored.

When A.C. Bradley first delivered the series of lectures which constitute the book Shakespearean Tragedy, many students of Shakespeare felt that the last word on Shakespeare's major tragedies had been spoken.

However, some of Bradley's opinions have not managed to survive the test of time, for example, his assertion that King Lear is too huge for the stage:

> that which makes the peculiar greatness of King Lear,--the immense scope of the work: the mass and variety of intense experience which it contains; the interpenetration of sublime imagination, piercing pathos; the vastness of the convulsion both of nature and of human passion; the vagueness of the scene where the action takes place, and of the movements of the figures which cross this scene; the strange atmosphere, cold and dark, which strikes on us as we enter this scene, enfolding these figures and magnifying their dim outlines like a winter mist; the half-realised suggestions of vast universal powers working in the world of individual fates and passions,--all this interferes with dramatic clearness even when the play is read, and in the

> theatre not only refuses to reveal itself fully through the senses but seems to be almost in contradiction with their reports.[1]

The success of Harley Granville-Barker's productions of King Lear has generally destroyed the validity of this argument. Unfortunately, Bradley's premise that the medium of the stage cannot do justice to the scope of King Lear is central to his examination of the play. He contends that the critic should read King Lear as a poem, and he proceeds to do so with only a few cursory acknowledgements of how certain scenes cry out for stage representation. By adopting this premise, Bradley's reading of the text becomes too literal, and he often fails to consider some of the dramatic subtleties which Shakespeare incorporated into the play.

But in spite of Bradley's pre-occupation with King Lear as a poem, it would be a mistake to ignore his analysis in toto. Some of his arguments are perfectly valid and his character sketches of the drama's principal characters are generally sound. Bradley's evaluation of the merits of the sub-plot is also essentially valid: he argues that the similarity between the Lear-Cordelia relationship and that of Gloucester and Edgar is not a redundancy but provides 'certain strictly dramatic advantages." "This repetition," he says,

> does not simply double the pain with which the tragedy is witnessed: it startles and terrifies by suggesting that the folly of Lear and the ingratitude of his daughters are no accidents or merely individual aberrations, but that in the dark cold world some fateful malignant influence is abroad, turning the hearts of fathers against their children and of the children against their fathers,

> smiting the earth with a curse, so that the brother gives the brother to death and the father the son, blinding the eyes, maddening the brain, freezing the springs of pity, numbing all powers except the nerves of anguish and the dull lust of life.[2]

Bradley does not specify the identity of the fateful malignant force, but it is not, in his opinion, divine.[3]

Bradley does seem to realize that the relationship between evil and the cosmological order underlies the thematic issues and moral questions of the drama. The evil characters, Bradley says, compel the audience to consider how anyone could be so absolutely malevolent, and to ask what it is that makes them that way. And the strain of thought which seems to resonate throughout the entire drama, says Bradley, is to be found in Lear's question: "Then let them anatomise Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III,vi,80-1)[4]

Bradley does not seem to feel that the drama answers this question, or its implications, in any ostensible form. Instead he proposes that King Lear dramatizes the conflict between the idealistic moralizing of Albany and Edgar, and the empirical actuality of the play's events: if The Divine Comedy recorded for Dante the justice and love of God, then, asks Bradley,

> What did King Lear record for Shakespeare? Something, it would seem, very different. This is certainly the most terrible picture that Shakespeare painted of the world. In no other of his tragedies does humanity appear more pitiably infirm or more hopelessly bad....Albany and Edgar may moralise on the divine justice as they will, but how, in the face of all that we see, shall we believe that they

> speak Shakespeare's mind? Is not his mind rather expressed in the bitter contrast between their faith and the events we witness, or in the scornful rebuke of those who take upon them the mystery of things as if they were God's spies?[5]

For Bradley, the answer to these questions is the affirmative, but, he proceeds to add, we must not allow ourselves to conclude that King Lear reflects Shakespeare's pessimism concerning the human condition. The play's "final and total result," he concludes,

> is one in which pity and terror,...are so blended with a sense of law and beauty that we feel at last, not depression and much less despair, but a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom.[6]

Bradley, therefore, finds solace in the existence of the heroic spirit and the presence of the mysterious: and he discovers in the unsurpassed beauty of Shakespeare's art some relief, and some compensation for the emotional pain generated by the spectacle of extreme evil, which is to be found in the tragedy of King Lear.

In Reaction To The Assertion That 'King Lear' Is Unstageable, Harley Granville-Barker Examines The Dramatic Aspects Of The Play And Argues For Its Place In The Canon Of The Stage.

"Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on stage," writes Charles Lamb, and until Harley Granville-Barker's productions in the 1930's, critics were mostly of Lamb's opinion:

> The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning

> up and disclosing to the bottom that sea his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it.[7]

The problem with Lamb's argument (and A.C. Bradley's)[8] is that it is incapable of proof. Regardless of the calibre of a production, we may always claim that our own imaginative reading of the text is superior to any stage version. To Shakespeare and his companions, however, the assertions of Lamb and Bradley regarding the play's greatness would have been received as rather queer compliments.[9] Shakespeare meant King Lear to be acted, says Granville-Barker, and acted it was, with enough success to merit a performance before James II at Whitehall. This fact alone should count for something.[10]

Lamb may be forgiven for his argument since he had never seen Shakespeare's King Lear on stage--only Nahum Tate's adaptation. Bradley, on the other hand, was completely aware of the differences between Shakespeare's King Lear and Tate's yet he prefers to treat the play as a poem because the "peculiar greatness" of the play is too huge for the stage. "Bradley's argument is weighty" says Granville-Barker,

> Yet--with all deference to a great critic--I protest that, as it stands, it is not valid. He is contending that a practical and practiced dramatist has here written a largely impracticable play. Before condemning these "Storm-scenes" he should surely consider their stagecraft--their mere stagecraft. For may not "the mere dramatist" have his answer hidden there?...Ought we, moreover, to assume--as Bradley seems to--that a play must necessarily make all its points and its full effect, point by point,

> clearly and completely, scene by scene, as the performance goes along? Not every play, I think.[11]

For a piece of music of similar calibre, Granville-Barker contends, one would need more than one hearing in order to appreciate its full greatness. Why, then, should the same not be true of King Lear? The question is rhetorical and is not meant to condone any ultimate obscurity in the drama, for in Granville-Barker's understanding of the play, there are no obscure aspects to King Lear. All the things of which Bradley complains are, according to Granville-Barker, necessary for rendering Lear's experience in an immediate form--

> the confusion of pathos, humor and sublime imagination, the vastness of the convulsion, the vagueness of the scene and the movements of the characters, the strange atmosphere and the half-realized suggestions--all this he [Shakespeare] needs as material for Lear's experience, and ours....To whatever metaphysical heights Lear himself may rise, some character (Kent and Gloucester through the storm and in the hovel, Edgar for the meeting with the blinded Gloucester), some circumstance, or a few salient and explicit phrases will always be found pointing the action on its way.[12]

For Granville-Barker, therefore, the play is extremely economical from a dramatic point of view and it is thereby able to involve the audience in the experience of Lear's emotions--the only way, he says, to empathize with the old King's predicament. To accomplish this task--"this hardest of tasks" --to convey Lear's experience to the audience, Shakespeare relies on the medium which is his strongest weapon--dramatic poetry. It is not necessary, according to Granville-Barker, that the special effects of the storm be impressive, for it is the elevated passion of Lear's speeches which is meant to

impress the audience and convey the power of the storm, and its significance, to them.[13] Shakespeare draws on the music and imaginative suggestion of poetry to create the various effects of the play: he uses it to express the conflicts, the emotions, the vastness and grandeur of its thematic design; all of which are implicit in the action of the drama. It is through the force of his dramatic poetry then that Shakespeare draws the consciousness of his audience into the experience of Lear. In the opinion of Granville-Barker, the dramatic function of Shakespeare's poetry is the most important, and most effective, dramatic quality of King Lear, for it ultimately acts as the medium of the dramatic conflict in that play.

Paradoxically, therefore, those aspects of King Lear which Bradley classifies as defects, Granville-Barker defends as the dramatic strengths of the drama, or argues that Bradley's assertions are excessive. A prime example of the latter is Granville-Barker's examination of Bradley's charges that along with the opening scene of the play, the gullibility of Gloucester and Edgar is an improbability which mars the rest of the drama. "Shakespeare asks us to allow him the fact of the deception [by Edmund]," suggests Granville-Barker,

> even as we have allowed him Lear's partition of the kingdom. It is his starting point, the dramatist's "let's pretend," which is as essential to the beginning of a play as a "let it be granted" to a proposition of Euclid. And, within bounds, the degree of pretense makes surprisingly little difference. It is what the assumption will commit him to that counts; once a play's action is under way it must develop as logically as Euclid, and far more logically than life. The art of the thing is to reward

> the spectator for his concession by never presuming on it; one should rather dress up the unlikely in the likelier.[14]

In the end, Granville-Barker argues, the emotional immediacy of the drama, that is, the painful presence of Lear's predicament, should make the audience forget the improbability of the play's opening, while the force of the dramatic poetry and the play's action draws the spectator into their vortex.[15]

Ultimately, however, it is in his observation on the dramatic quality of Shakespeare's poetry that Granville-Barker has isolated the most important strength of King Lear: and by his successful transferal of the text from the page to the plastic medium of the stage, Granville-Barker has restored the dramatic point of view to critical studies of King Lear, a point of view which is vital to a meaningful understanding of this play.

The Character Of Lear Is Frequently Examined In Respect To The Self-Knowledge He Acquires Through Suffering And In Respect To His Resultant Spiritual Regeneration.

There is, among Shakespeare critics, a school which tends to approach Shakespeare's tragedies from a Christian point of view.[16] Generally, this school is characterized by one of two interpretations--that Shakespeare's tragedies affirm Christian doctrine, or that Shakespeare's tragedies are, in essence, morality plays which depict the conflict of Christian virtues and vices. In respect to the former position (the latter will be discussed later), there is R.W. Chamber's

assertion that "King Lear is, like the Paradiso [of Dante], a vast poem on the victory of true love"[17] and Geoffrey L. Bickersteth's contention that, when writing King Lear, Shakespeare "was unconsciously inspired by a story taken...from Christian mythology" so that the role of Cordelia became analagous to that of Christ.[18] Then there is S.L. Bethel's insistence that at the end of the play, "Lear, after being bound upon his fiery wheel in this life, is...fit for heaven."[19] And Paul N. Siegel takes such positions even further when he argues that, in Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia,

> It was as if from purgatory he had heard the celestial music and seen the angelic radiance that he was at last about to attain, a vision of what he would experience after death....This miracle is the redemption of Lear for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth. The analogy between Cordelia and Christ, who redeemed human nature from the curse brought on it by Adam and Eve, is made unmistakable, although not crudely explicit.[20]

This school of critics emphasizes the idea of a spiritual regeneration in Lear which leads the tragic hero toward the adoption of the Christian values he originally lacked or neglected.[21]

The idea of spiritual regeneration as an aspect of tragedy is actually Aristotelian, and its presence in King Lear has been examined by many critics, especially A.C. Bradley and G. Wilson Knight. Bradley's position has already been examined but Knight's, though similar, is worth investigating at this time. Knight describes Lear as a soul in Purgatory, learning of his flaws and transgressions, and growing wiser

through suffering until he becomes "a soul in bliss" during his re-union with Cordelia. But the religion of King Lear, says Knight, is naturalistic, spontaneously developing from nature-magic to "God". And Knight is careful to add that it is not a Christian "God" but rather "Job's God" of whom Lear becomes aware.[22] "But," he adds in respect to Lear's regeneration, "it is all a natural process: there is no celestial avatar to right misguided humanity."[23]

For the Christian-allegorist school,[24] it is of course a Christian god which Lear must come to know and accept, and the old King's tragedy lies in the usurpation of his rational faculties by the lower elements of his nature, which seduce him into deviating from the proper position. Lear's tragedy, argues Lily B. Campbell, lies in the fact that his reason is overpowered by the passion of wrath,[25] and for this reason, the play acts as a moral exemplum which instructs the spectator in the dangers of human passion and enacts the punishment of this evil by divine providence.[26]

The concept of tragedy as a moral exemplum is taken one step further by Oscar James Campbell in his article, "The Salvation of Lear," where he argues that King Lear is the "sublime apotheosis of a rigid and emotionally barren form of moral instruction."[27] Lear, in Campbell's opinion, resembles an everyman who needs to discover the proper road to salvation: Lear must learn to be stoical and accept his misfortunes as "a divine instrument for the development and training of a man in virtue."[28] King Lear, therefore, is "a sublime morality

play, the action of which is set against a back-drop of eternity."[29]

But unlike the typical morality play, says Campbell, King Lear does not present human salvation in orthodox theological terms, or even in Christian terms.[30] The focus of Lear's quest, according to Campbell, is Cordelia, who represents "Christian love". It is her spirit which redeems Lear's tortured soul for she is allegorically a Christ-figure.[31] For this reason, Lear's suffering has no earthly benefits because it "prepares Lear not for a life of stoic tranquility on this earth, but for the heavenly joy of a redeemed soul."[32] Campbell is, of course, describing a Christian experience which he had previously claimed was not operating in the drama. Unfortunately, such contradictions are frequent in Campbell's study, and at one point he even seems to forget that he believes King Lear to be a morality play, since he begins to discuss aspects of the play which are alien to the genre.[33]

The Most Substantial Rebuttal To The Neo-Christian Interpretations Of 'King Lear' Is W.R. Elton's "'King Lear' And The Gods", In Which He Argues That The Background Of Religious Thought In'King Lear' Is Ostensibly Pagan.

Elton's purpose in this study is to investigate the validity of the widely-held view that King Lear is "an optimistically Christian drama."[34] Essentially, he says, Christian interpretations of King Lear tend to fall into two categories--those that by analogy to the morality play tradition view the protagonist as somehow redeemed, and those

that see presiding over human action a benevolent or personal providence.[35] In the course of his study, Elton tests both of these hypotheses against the history of Renaissance religious thought and concludes that the religious attitudes expressed in King Lear would be viewed by the Renaissance spectator as essentially pagan.

Elton begins his study with a brief review of those critics who read King Lear in terms of Christian optimism: immediately following this outline, Elton acknowledges some of the critics who have already taken issue with the Christian approach.[36] In the second chapter of his study, Elton examines "The skeptical disintegration of providential belief,...the breakdown of the medieval analogical relation, and the progressive distancing of God from man." The central figures in this chapter are Calvin and Montaigne, both of whom insist that divine actions are "beyond the power of feeble human reason to grasp or to evaluate."[37] This attack, says Elton, served to widen the gap between the divine and human orders, and to create, in effect, a deus absconditus. The last chapter in this first part of Elton's study consists of a comparison between Shakespeare's King Lear and the earlier chronicle play of King Leir, which is generally held to be a major source for Shakespeare's play. This chapter is Elton's first substantial assault on the neo-Christian interpretations of King Lear, for the earlier play is permeated with Christian perspectives. King Leir, says Elton, is an expressly Christian drama with a just, knowable, ever-present God participating in the events of

the drama.[38] And the Leir of this earlier play lives by a most un-Lear-like moral:

> Ah, my true friend in all extremity,
> Let vs submit vs to the will of God:
> Things past all sence, let vs not seeke to know;
> It is Gods will, and therefore must be so.[39]

The extent of Shakespeare's alterations to this story, especially to the ending where Cordella restores her wronged father to his former estate, indicates to Elton that Shakespeare wished to remove his King Lear from the context of a Christian world view, and from any promises of the comfort of faith in virtue rewarded.[40]

The second part of Elton's study is his most extensive attack upon the neo-Christian readings of King Lear. Elton undertakes an investigation of the attitudes toward the divine hierarchy which are expressed by the different characters in King Lear. He suggests that there are four distinct attitudes toward the divine order embodied in the drama of King Lear, all of which, he says, would be recognised as ostensibly pagan by an Elizabethan-Jacobean spectator. The four attitudes Elton defines as (1) the prisca theologica, or virtuous-heathen view; (2) the atheistic view; (3) the superstitious view; (4) that view which belongs to none of the others, but results from human contemplation of the effects of hidden providence.[41] Each of the major figures of the drama, Elton says, express one of these views toward the divine order, which in their entirety would suggest to Shakespeare's contemporaries that the characters of the play exist "under a

natural order rather than a revealed theology and under a dispensation of nature without Grace."[42]

The first view, the prisca theologica, is expressed by Cordelia and Edgar, who embody the virtues of order, piety, harmony, duty and human compassion; as Cordelia says,

> Good my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I
> Return those duties back as are right fit,
> Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
> (I, i, 92-5)

Those who exhibit these virtues and pieties would, like the inhabitants of Dante's Limbo, be capable of salvation in the eyes of Shakespeare's contemporaries for their actions would essentially prefigure Christian attitudes, although their perpetrator's religious outlook was ostensibly pagan.[44]

The atheists' view holds that man is governed by chance, fortune and his animal appetites rather than by the divine, an attitude which had its sources in such classical authors as Aristotle, Lucretius, Cicero, and Pliny, and in such contemporary writers as Michel de Montaigne, Christopher Marlowe and, above all, Niccolo Machiavelli. The atheistical view entails not only a denial of God's existence, but also the skeptical questioning of the divine order by speculating that providence is faulty; that the human soul is not immortal; that the nature of man is animalistic and not divine; that nature, not God, holds ascendancy over man. All of these speculations, moreover, are characteristic of Renaissance skepticism, which questioned (in the late Sixteenth Century) the validity of the prevailing Christian world view.

The atheistical view toward the divine order had two manifestations during the Renaissance: the skeptic, or outward atheist, who questions the nature of the divine order, and the hypocrite, or inward atheist, who denies the existence of the divine in favour of the primacy of Nature and who is characterized by Machiavellian dissembling. The representative of the former is Lear (who will be discussed later) whereas Edmund, Goneril and Regan represent the latter view.[45] In the case of the wicked children, "the emphasis [of their philosophy] is on naturalism to a maximum degree and thus on a preoccupation with nature and with self, with a minimizing of super-natural interposition" in the affairs of men.[46]

"These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us," the Earl of Gloucester says(I, ii, 111-2) when he is informed of Edgar's "treachery", and this sentiment immediately establishes Gloucester as a superstitious pagan, the third view of the divine order which Elton investigates in his book. The superstitious view of the divine order holds that the divine presence is prefigured in omens or auguries, and revealed by oracles, soothsayers and astronomers.[47] The superstitious man, moreover, lacks faith in providence, substituting for it a world filled with hidden menaces and dark threats; a world governed by chance, destiny or fate; a world in which the gods, if they exist at all, act not benignly and justly but kill men for their sport--attitudes which are generally antagonistic to Christian doctrine.[48]

The last attitude Elton examines is the belief in a

deus absconditus, an attitude which results from speculation on an inscrutable, hidden divine order which seems to embody cruelty and injustice in its actions.[49] Elton examines, at length, the disintegration of Lear's religious attitudes from a position of religious piety, having faith in the gods who made him, through a period of skepticism, to an attitude of disbelief, in which he adopts a stance toward the divine order similar to that of Edmund, Goneril and Regan. Lear's period of skepticism appears at the end of Act II when, as Goneril arrives at Regan's castle, Lear voices doubt concerning the nature of the divine order for the first time in the play: "Oh Heavens," the old King prays,

> If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
> Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
> Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part!
> (II, iv, 192-5)

From this attitude of skepticism, Lear moves to one of disbelief; to an attitude of atheism, we may say, in that he voices the opinion that man's nature is animalistic ("Thou art the thing itself [a poor, bare forked animal]." (III, iv, 107)) and he questions the operation of providence by taking upon himself the "trial" of Goneril and Regan in Act III, Scene vi. When he is reunited with Cordelia, Lear's religious attitude changes again, this time to an attitude defined by abnegation and exclusion, forfeit and contemptus mundi. It is an attitude, moreover, by which Lear hopes (if vainly) to oppose all earthly mutability. "Come, let's away to prison" he says to Cordelia,

> We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage....
> . . . . . .
> ...So we'll live,
> And pray and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of Court news....
> . . . . . .
> ...And we'll wear out,
> In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.
> (V, iii, 8-19)

It is an attitude to earthly events, however, that is immediately shattered by the subsequent murder of Cordelia, which brings Lear not to a state of salvation and bliss, as the neo-Christian interpretations suggest, but to a state of bewilderment and despair, and to the feeling that death is the termination of all life--an attitude which is specifically anti-Christian in its outlook on the human predicament.[50]

Elton concludes, therefore, that King Lear cannot be interpreted in terms of Christian doctrine for two crucial reasons: "(1) no evidence exists to show Lear arrives finally at 'salvation', 'regeneration', or 'redemption,' and (2) the purported benevolent, just, or special providence cannot be shown to be operative [in the events of the drama]."[51] Instead, the action of King Lear unfolds in a naturalistic world where the comforts of revealed theology and the dispensation of grace are visibly absent from the religious attitudes of men. As Elton demonstrates throughout his book, King Lear is a play permeated with religious attitudes and expressions which an Elizabethan-Jacobean audience would recognise as ostensibly pagan in their outlook on human experience. The religious crisis embodied in the drama, moreover, is essentially

similar to the theological crisis of doubt which was gradually eroding the orthodox humanist world view circa 1605. The benefits of the pagan atmosphere of King Lear, therefore, (according to Elton) are two-fold: by locating the action of the drama in a pagan setting, Shakespeare secures for the play "the approbation of the less speculative devout" in his audience, who would be generally offended by expressions of superstition and atheism; and he obtains the interest of the more sophisticated spectators, by vividly portraying the image of the all-dissolving chaos, before those who could not turn aside and stop the horrible beatings of their troubled minds.[52]

There Is A Subtle Shade Of Sarcasm In The Title Of Barbara Everett's Article, "The New King Lear"[53] For She Clearly Considers The "New" 'King Lear' To Be Notably Inferior To The "Old" 'King Lear'.

The 'new' in the title of Miss Everett's study refers to the theory that King Lear is essentially a play which espouses Christian doctrine and could possibly be interpreted as a Christian allegory, views which were popularly held at the time of her investigation. Her fundamental antipathy to a Christian reading of the drama surfaces early in the article:

> Those critics who find in the play either a partial, or a total Christian allegory, are alike in one thing, however different their respective approaches may be: this is an interest in such parts of the play as seem to make a statement which is differentiated from the"plot" (that is, the story as it would stand as a prose tale.) They are interested in the kind of "poetic" statements which the play seems to make, in contradistinction from what actually happens.[54]

Whether or not one agrees with the overall hypothesis of her study, her point in the quotation above is well taken. Criticism which seeks some form of statement that is not associated with the narrative elements of a work is dubious at best and frequently uninspiring; but this point is not the basis of her arguments against the Christian-oriented theories concerning King Lear. Her repudiation of the theories which see Christian doctrine as the informing thought behind the drama pursues two distinct directions in the course of her study.

The first aspect of her study consists of a review of King Lear criticism, in which she contrasts the opinions of the Christian-oriented critics to the standard-bearer of the "old" King Lear, namely A.C. Bradley. Miss Everett's admiration for the opinions of Bradley is undeniable and might even support an accusation of bias. Her selection of opinions for comparison, however, is so skillful that, regardless of our personal predilections, Miss Everett's perspectives demand serious consideration from the reader. Throughout this section of her article, she demonstrates the extent to which the more recent criticism of King Lear relies on the perceptions and hypotheses of Bradley, and at one point, she delineates how "many of Bradley's cautious hints and suggestions [have been] purified of their accompanying reservations."[55] A typical example of this occurrence is the difference in attitude between Bradley and Prof. Kenneth Muir,

concerning the ending of the play. While Bradley had suggested that Lear dies in ecstacy, thinking that Cordelia is alive, but that "suffering and death do matter greatly",[56] Prof. Muir contends that, although Lear does die happy, his "actual death was comparatively unimportant."[57] Miss Everett finds this similarity in attitude rather curious in that Muir had argued most forcefully in favour of a Christian reading of the play whereas Bradley had argued that such a perspective would mar the tragic effect of the drama.[58]

In the second half of her study, Miss Everett shifts the focus of her investigation from a review of other critics' attitudes to a personal study of those aspects of King Lear which contradict the hypotheses of the critics who read the play in Christian terms. Starting with an acknowledgement that one cannot decide "simply, whether or not King Lear is a 'Christian' play", Miss Everett goes on to state that it is not the business of criticism to resolve this categorical dilemma, but to explore "the kind of statement which Shakespeare is making in King Lear; whether or not it is as doctrinal, and as didactic" as the Christian-allegorists suggest.[59] Consequent to this position, Miss Everett proceeds to examine certain aspects of King Lear which she feels contribute to a fuller understanding of the play's statement and which undermine the hypotheses of the Christian-allegorist critics.

Before she commences her personal examination of King Lear, however, Miss Everett does make one concession to the

Christian-allegorist critics. She admits that, through a selective reading of the text,[60] one can read King Lear as a Christian allegory and this attitude, she adds, "remains a permanent possibility in that any picture of good and evil actions must contain suggestions of Christian experience" and therefore be susceptible to allegorical interpretation.[61] By the time she has concluded her personal investigation of the drama, however, it is clear that there are certain aspects of King Lear which are not fully explained by allegorical interpretation.

The first aspect which Miss Everett examines is the character of Lear himself. Miss Everett points out that, ultimately, Lear is a man who undergoes a traumatic emotional upheaval and finally admits he is "old and foolish". Lear is a man, she says, whose "simplest discoveries become...a matter of immediate physical experience, [which is] felt both intensely and comprehensively." Any attempt to blur this fact with moral outlines, regardless of how metaphysical they may be in intention, is to fail to define the character of Lear satisfactorily.[62]

Miss Everett also argues against an allegorical reading of King Lear by demonstrating the intensely antithetical perspectives which the drama presents to the audience. Lear, she says, who in his totality of experience demands absolutes of love, power, and truth, is repaid "by an apprehension of the one absolute that the tragic world can offer--the absolute of silence" and death. The sense of startling disparities

within a single imaginative universe, Miss Everett suggests, is hardly similar to the "symbolic clarity of a Morality or the simplicity of a mystery play." The universe of King Lear departs radically from the medieval world view, upon which the mystery and morality plays were based: in the opinion of Miss Everett, therefore, an explanation of King Lear is not best effected by turning the play into a moral allegory.[63]

Robert B. Heilman Examines The Patterns Of Imagery In 'King Lear' And How They Combine To Produce The Play's Major Theme --The Ways Of Looking At And Assessing The World Of Human Experience.[64]

Robert B. Heilman's This Great Stage is an extensive study of the lexical patterns of King Lear, a play in which "we have," according to Heilman, "...an immensely inclusive anthropology, an effort unequaled in drama to get at the problem of man from every side and in every aspect, to give it the fullest and most variegated possible expression in differentiable and yet collaborating strands of poetic and dramatic structure."[65] And the various themes which carry out these functions are not simply supported by the lexical patterns, but are actually conveyed by the patterns of imagery which are woven throughout the drama.[66] Ultimately, Heilman says, King Lear does not attempt to provide final answers to the "problem of man", but presents instead "a contrast in the quality of lives" in which the strengths and weaknesses of each character are revealed.[67]

Heilman's study focuses on nine major inter-related themes, each of which, he says, is conveyed by a unique pattern of imagery. The theme of tragic blindness, for example, is borne by the imagery associated with sight--eyes, seeing blindness, perceiving--and is related to the theme of appearance versus reality, which is carried by the imagery of clothing (including a lack thereof). According to Heilman, these two themes resonate together to produce speculation on the problem of penetrating the appearance of a character, in order to arrive at the reality beneath. A specific example of this relationship is Gloucester's lack of insight into human nature, which allows Edmund to dupe his father into believing that his appearance of filial devotion is in fact real; or alternatively, it is Gloucester's lack of insight (the blindness theme) which occasions his confusion of appearance for reality when assessing the characters of Edmund and Edgar. And this combination of themes is naturally drawing into its vortex, the theme of the nature of man, which, Heilman says, is carried by the animal and sexual imagery of the play. These three themes, therefore, combine to present the spectator with a delineation of how a lack of insight in Gloucester and Lear blinds them to the reality of the animal nature of Edmund, and Goneril and Regan, respectively.

When Gloucester and Lear realize their blindness, and can perceive more clearly the world around them, then the fourth problem-theme asserts itself in the drama, namely the

nature of nature. This theme is conveyed by the various uses of the word "nature",[68] many of which involve the invocation of a deity. And co-existent with this problem-theme is the problem-theme of age and justice in a natural order which tolerates antitheses,that is, two conflicting world views. The tension between youth and old age and the question of the existence of justice arise naturally when the character of the natural order is uncertain. And if the value of age and the existence of justice become doubtful because of uncertainty regarding the natural order, then by degrees, the very value of man must also become a problem. In King Lear, the problem of human worth is an important theme, for: "The whole play, of course, acts values; it is a metaphor for the values of human experience...[and] each deed [moreover] is a value judgement."[69] This theme, the seventh in Heilman's study, is carried by such words as "dear", "precious", "worth", "poor", "penury", "need", and the other words associated with riches and poverty. In King Lear, according to Heilman,"an evaluative attitude to life" plays a prominent role in the play's action, and Lear himself is a "value-maker".[70] But Lear's attempt to reason out the value of man leads him into a state of madness in which he is able to explore the enigmatic aspects of life on their own terms. This paradox of madness and reason, moreover, also plays a vital role in King Lear for it conveys many of the philosophical issues of the drama and helps to reveal the characters of Edgar, Lear,

Goneril, Regan and Edmund. The mad raving of Edgar and Lear, for example, explores the themes we have traced above and is (as Edgar characterizes the madness of Lear) "matter and impertinency mixed!/Reason in madness." (IV, vi, 178-9) The reasoning madness of Edgar and Lear provides an appropriate foil to the ultra-rationality of Edmund, Goneril and Regan, whose every action is carefully rationalized in an apparently logical manner. Their "reason", however, is devoid of any ethical context or any imaginative capacity: for this reason, the rationality of Edmund, Goneril and Regan is really a form of madness. It is directed toward the gratification of their own desires rather than toward any ethical values which may redeem their humanity.[71]

The final theme of Heilman's study is one which he claims incorporates, or extends, all of the others--that is, man's relationship to the gods. There are many references to deities in King Lear : the various characters invoke, at various times, "Nature", the "Heavens", and the "gods" through prayers and oaths. These references, moreover, appear to be casual because they lack any Christian foci; in Heilman's opinion, however, this is not the case. References to the gods are made consistent with the character of their speaker, and with an underlying pattern of religious thought. In the case of the former, we may note that Goneril and Regan hardly ever refer to the divine order, whereas Edmund invokes Nature and the gods in terms unique to his outlook. The pervading

pattern of religious thought, according to Heilman, is represented by the religious attitude of Edgar, Albany and Kent, "whose religious feeling," Heilman says, "manifests itself... in reiteration of the faith in a divinely administered just order."[72] The primacy of this attitude, according to Heilman, is achieved by the fact that the religious consciousness of Gloucester and Lear develops toward it, and hence, the play's final vision is a re-affirmation of the orthodox world view. Gloucester's religious attitude, for example, undergoes a perceptible change from a perspective of superstition: "These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us" (I, ii, 112) to a mood of despair: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,/They kill us for their sport." (IV, i, 38-9) Finally, the dutiful tutoring of Edgar brings Gloucester to a different religious sensibility--one of quiet acquiescence to the will of heaven:

> You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me
> Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
> To die before you please!
> (IV, vi, 221-3)

Heilman attempts to argue the same progression in Lear's religious consciousness. "Lear," he says, "is constantly aware of the gods; in oaths and curses he...calls upon them as if they were spirits" to do his bidding.[73] The events of the play, however, shatter Lear's easy security and he is forced to reconsider his relationship with the gods. Finally, Heilman says, Lear learns humility and contrition and his religious thought becomes permeated with Christian

feeling,[74] an attitude prevalent in his last speeches to Cordelia: "When thou dost ask me blessing," he says to her,

> I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of Court news. And we'll talk with them too,
> . . . . . .
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies.
> (V, iii, 10-17)

In his examination of the "man-and-the-gods" theme, and particularly in his study of Lear and the gods, Heilman ventures on to critically dubious ground. He does not believe that Cordelia's subsequent death affects Lear's religious outlook in any way--in fact, he does not even mention it during his examination of Lear's religious perspectives. And his assertion that the pervading religious attitude of King Lear is embodied in Edgar, Albany and Kent, rather than in the central character of Lear, is a stance I find critically questionable to say the least. On the whole, one senses that Heilman is attempting to fit King Lear to his own understanding of human existence, especially in his study of the "man-and-the-gods" theme and his general conclusions about the play: he seems, as Helen Gardiner observes, to be writing about himself, seen from the perspective of King Lear.[75]

But even if we may take issue with Heilman's overall perspectives of King Lear, his individual examinations of the play's patterns of imagery are quite sound, and the lexical patterns do tend to convey and support the themes of the play. The virtue of employing patterns of imagery in this manner

lies in the fact that they do not do all of their work at once, but call on habits of response and association.[76] In this way, Shakespeare is able to develop his themes as the drama progresses rather than stating them at its inception. A series of inter-related themes, carried by unique patterns of imagery, also serves to unite the diverse aspects and ideas of the play into a consistent vision which is thereby more comprehensible, and more engaging, to the mind of the spectator.

Ultimately, Heilman argues, there are no simple or easy answers to the problem-themes of King Lear for the play is full of paradox: "the blind see, the naked survive, and wisdom belongs to the mad."[77] Instead, the spectator is presented with a multitude of philosophical implications through the poetic and dramatic structure of the play: and

> throughout the verbal and dramatic patterns of the play, throughout the structural dualities, there is a justice (whatever the injustice in fact), there is an order (whatever the chaos in fact), there is an underlying reality (whatever the deceptiveness of appearance); in man there is a sight (whatever the blindness in fact) and an imaginative understanding (whatever the rationalistic obtuseness that may periodically dominate him) by which he may seize upon the realities necessary to his survival. These are the implications of the key words of the play.[78]

And these themes, according to Heilman, are the vision of King Lear which Shakespeare presents to the spectator.

CHAPTER II

NATURALISM IN KING LEAR

Elizabethan Writers Saw In Their World The Operation Of Antithetical Forces, The Presence Of Which They Frequently Acknowledged Within A Single Literary Work.

In the sixteenth century, all aspects of the prevailing world view of Christian humanism came under close scrutiny and skeptical questioning from all quarters. As a result, the writers of the Elizabethan period, and particularly those whom we recognise as great, demonstrate in their works an enigmatic character which frequently baffles the modern reader. "In no other period in literature with which I am familiar," writes Hiram Collins Haydn, "is there such a schizophrenic tendency. Nowhere else will one find such a strange mingling--in the same men, even in single passages--of affirmation and rebellion, idealism and cynicism, aspiration and pessimism, delicacy and grossness, exuberance and despair."[1] The co-existence of antithetical philosophies in the Elizabethan period naturally precipitated a prominent philosophical conflict and, for a sensitive artist such as Shakespeare, this conflict undoubtedly

created an unstable psychological milieu which would easily lend itself to pessimism and despair.

According to Hiram Haydn, the philosophical conflict of the Renaissance consisted of two, mutually exclusive movements which perceived in each other precisely those evils which their doctrines sought to avoid. The one movement was dominated by the world view characteristic of the European Renaissance--Christian humanism: the other movement was what Hiram Haydn calls the "Counter-Renaissance", for it opposed humanist presuppositions with questions generated by a basically empirical naturalism.

The writers of both movements explored the same basic subjects and, as a result, they tended to employ essentially the same vocabulary in their discussions of the moral, political and legal principles of human existence. Frequently, therefore, the modern reader may be confused by certain writers of the Counter-Renaissance for, although they employed the same vocabulary as the Christian humanists, they did so with highly different implications. This difference in terminology is especially significant in relation to the central theme of both movements--the relationship between "Reason" and "Nature". To the Christian writers of the Renaissance, the terms "Reason" and "Nature" were synonymous, or at least mutually supplementary.[2] The Christian humanists were the standard-bearers of a tradition which originated with Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, and represented an ordered, symmetrical, unified system of thought which they believed was

manifest in the natural world. And throughout the Renaissance, says Haydn, Reason remained the watchword of the Christian philosophers. To the writers of the Counter-Renaissance, however, "Nature" and "Reason" were mutually exclusive entities. The term "Nature" was employed as a catchword "proclaiming the rights of a full and uninhibited life of the passions, the senses and the instincts", whereas the term "Reason" was employed by these writers to denote an artificial control intruding upon man's natural instincts and inclinations.[3]

To what extent, however, does the action of King Lear embody the intellectual upheaval which occurred during the Renaissance? In this chapter, I propose to explore how the two world views can be seen in conflict within that play. It will be necessary, therefore, to investigate the two philosophies at greater length, after which we shall proceed to examine the effect of their conflict on the characters in the drama, and how the conflict generates many of the problems which perplex such characters as Lear, Gloucester and Albany. We shall then examine how the philosophical conflict between the humanists and the "anti-humanists" is germane to the major themes and issues of the drama. Ultimately, therefore, this chapter involves an exploration of the nature of the universe in which the action of King Lear occurs and a consideration of how the various characters act in, and react to, that world.

'King Lear' Dramatizes The Various Meanings Of The Word "Nature" The Most Prominent Of Which Is The Renaissance Humanist Usage Of The Word To Indicate "The Visible Creation Regarded As An Orderly [Benign] Arrangement" Which Emanates From God.

If we are to understand the predicament of the characters in King Lear, we must be aware of their conception of the world in which they live. Essentially, their universe is that of Renaissance England except that the pre-Christian setting of the play necessitates the substitution of "the gods" for "God" as the summit of the divine. The various characters in the play represent the different philosophical viewpoints current in the early seventeenth century and tend to group themselves around the two poles of intellectual contention--Reason and Nature. Edgar, Kent, Cordelia and Albany represent the orthodox world view which emphasizes Reason while Edmund, Cornwall, Goneril and Regan represent the "Machiavellian" world view which stresses a libertine Nature.

Mankind's universal quest has been for order, unity and harmony--perhaps no other group of men came closer to realizing this quest than the scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages. Needless to say, their world view was a precarious one. The men of the Renaissance, however, "altered the emphasis of the orthodox medieval world view, but did not break with it."[5] Renaissance Christian humanists adhere to the Thomist system of universal law, which is based on the assumption that certain rationally ascertainable norms of conduct are valid for the entire world, but for the adherents of Renaissance humanism, the emphasis on the term "Christian

humanism" falls on the second term rather than on the first, as it had in the Middle Ages.[6] In the humanist world view, therefore, the universal order, or "Nature", is a normative force to which everyone should adhere and in which man must fulfill his pre-defined potential: Nature, then, is

> a structure ascending from primordal matter up to God. It...takes for granted that parents are to be honoured and human decencies observed. It assumes as the absolute shape for man an image of tenderness, comfort, generosity, charity, courtesy, and gratitude.[7]

It is a little misleading, however, to say, as Danby has, that the universal structure ascends to God: instead we should say that the universal order emanates from God (or in the case of King Lear, from the gods), a point Richard Hooker argues in his Ecclesiastical Polity:

> it cannot be but nature hath some director of infinite knowledge to guide her in all her ways. Who the guide of nature but only the God of nature? In him wee liue, moue, and are. Those things which nature is said to do, are by diuine arte performed-vsing nature as a instrument: nor is there any such arte or knowledge diuine in nature her selfe working, but in the guide of natures worke.[8]

Nature, therefore, is arranged by God, rationally and benevolently, so, as Francis Bacon observes: "no one can treat of metaphysics, or of the internal and immutable in nature, without rushing at once into natural theology."[9]

An important aspect of Renaissance humanism is Stoicism, or more specifically, eclectic Stoicism. Some caution, however, must be exercised when the term "Stoic" is used in relation to the Renaissance for there were two divergent types present at that time. The one, "eclectic Stoicism",

was firmly and comfortably part of the humanist tradition; the other, "dogmatic Cynic-Stoicism", belonged to the Counter-Renaissance because of its extreme concepts of honour and its denial of limit.[10] Eclectic Stoicism wedded the philosophy of patience, or endurance, to the harmony and "natural theology" of orthodox humanism: eclectic Stoics cultivated the virtue of patience and believed in the natural goodness of the world, but they tended to seek "inner comfort" and security for self-gratification and as bulwarks against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune".[11]

Several of the important characters in King Lear display some of the attributes of eclectic Stoicism, or at least, they exhibit Stoic apathy toward worldly misfortune while upholding the orthodox ideals of order, duty, right and truth. The Duke of Kent is the "sturdy Stoic" commentator who endures all with Stoic apathy while he champions the cause of right, truth and order. And there is Edgar, the dutiful son of Stoicism who becomes, through his sufferings, a didactic Stoic philosopher, "a man of proved virtue and endurance." Finally, there is Cordelia, the model of virtue, truth, and patience; who refuses "to heave her heart into her mouth."[12] (Although the Duke of Albany also stands for the traditional ideals of duty, order and humanity, he is not, like the others, specifically Stoical.)

The representatives of orthodox humanism are not offered as patterns of perfection by Shakespeare. John F. Danby suggests that the Stoic characters are very human but

somewhat old-fashioned.[13] And each of the Stoics, moreover, follows his philosophy unflinchingly, and without remorse, so that at some point in the drama, each one is Stoical to a fault.

Kent, the plain speaker, follows the dictates of duty naturally, and he himself makes a point of this early in the play:

> Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
> When power to flattery bows? To plainess honour's bound
> When majesty stoops to folly.
> (I, i, 149-51)

At the end of the play, Kent is still true to the ideals of Renaissance Stoicism in that he sees death as the only possible relief from the earthly misery of "outrageous fortune":

> Break, heart, I prithee break!
> . . . . . .
> Vex not his ghost. Oh, let him pass! He hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer.
> (V, iii, 312-15)

Kent, however, is a little too zealous in his pursuit of duty, a fact which he demonstrates in his dealings with Oswald; and he is rather proud of his own blunt speaking. There is, therefore, some validity to Cornwall's assessment of the Stoical Kent that

> This is some fellow
> Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
> A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
> Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he
> An honest mind and plain--he must speak truth!
> An they will take it, so. If not, he's plain.
> (II, ii, 101-6)

From the beginning of the drama, Edgar is master of himself; full of patience during the changes of fortune and

resolute in his desire to endure.[14] Like Kent, Edgar is the portrait of patience and duty, and with admirable Stoic apathy, he waits for a change in fortune after Edmund dupes their father:

> Whiles I may 'scape
> I will preserve myself, and am bethought
> To take the basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury in contempt of man
> Brought near to beast ...
> . . . . . .
> That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.
> (II, iii, 5-21)

But in moments of great misfortune Edgar is prone to didacticism and moralizing:

> [EDGAR] King Lear hath lost, he and his daughter ta'en.
> Give me thy hand, come on.
> GLOUCESTER. No further, sir, A man may rot even here.
> EDGAR. What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither.
> Ripeness is all. Come on.
> (V, ii, 6-11)

And as Haydn observes, Edgar, at his best, is somewhat "prissy" and "self-righteous", as in the following passage:[15]

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes.
> (V, iii, 170-4)

To claim that Gloucester's loss of his eyes is a just sentence for having fathered Edmund is hardly a compassionate assessment of his father's error, and at this point in the play it appears rather heartless and cold-blooded.

Cordelia also emulates the Stoic pattern in that she is the epitome "of virtuous plain-spokenness and truth,"[16] a characteristic which she exhibits early in the play:

> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
> According to my bond, nor more, nor less.
> (I, i, 93-5)

Cordelia's actions are grounded on the humanist "Laws of Nature", a system of propriety in human relations which stems from "natural instincts". Cordelia, therefore, represents normative humanity which embodies the Renaissance concept of "natural theology": according to John F. Danby, she stands for individual and social sanity.[17] In the minds of many critics, Cordelia is Shakespeare's answer to the problems raised in King Lear. She represents Nature, the Great Chain of Being, the Elizabethan world view in its unified, total, communal aspect---"she is the norm by which the wrongness of Edmund's world and the imperfection of Lear's is judged." But Cordelia cannot survive the assaults of fickle Fortune and as John F. Danby admits, "Cordelia...stands for no historically realizable arrangement. Her perfection of truth, justice, charity requires a New Jerusalem"[18] If Danby is correct in this assertion, then Shakespeare would be offering an impractical solution to the issues involved in King Lear. This interpretation, however, is unlikely. Cordelia is not Shakespeare's answer to the conflict that King Lear poses to the spectator. She does not triumph in the final battle: she is defeated. She does not, moreover, survive the afflictions of the world of King Lear: she is destroyed by them. Cordelia is the hope "which does redeem all sorrows" (V, iii, 266)--a hope which Shakespeare is not prepared to guarantee to the human race.

In Opposition To The Christian Humanists Of The Renaissance Stand Those Thinkers Committed To Various Shades Of Naturalism. These Men Variously Deny The Validity Of Humanist Idealism And Consider Reason And Nature As Diametrical Opposites.

The naturalist thinkers of the Renaissance were a motley group of individuals who diverged in such different directions of thought as the heretical naturalism of Guillaume du Vair,[19] the materialistic naturalism of Niccolo Machiavelli, and the naturalistic humanism of Michel de Montaigne. The naturalists, however, agreed on two points--that Reason was an artificial regulation imposed on human existence, and that Reason inhibited a full realization of life's potentials.

The Renaissance version of Stoicism held that a life according to Nature meant a life according to Reason. The so-called "naturalists" of the period, however, associated the term "Nature" with ethical Epicureanism, which had its emphasis on "a life of the senses, self-indulgence, and freedom from restraint."[20] A representative expression of the naturalist position is made by Montaigne, when he remarks that

> I have (as elsewhere I noted) taken for my regard this ancient precept, very rawly and simply: That We cannot erre in following Nature; and that the soveraigne document is for a man to conforme himselfe to her. I have not (as Socrates), by the power and vertue of reason, corrected my natural complexions, nor by Art hindered mine inclination. Looke how I came into the World, soe I goe-on: I strive with nothing.[21]

In making this assertion, Montaigne takes issue with the primacy of Reason, and elsewhere in his Essayes, he argues for the inclusion of man's animal appetites as a valid aspect of human existence:

> That part of natures favours which we impart unto beasts, is by our owne confession much more advantageous unto them. We assume unto our selves imaginarie and fantastical goods, future and absent goods, which humane capacitie can no way warrant unto ourselves; as reason, honour, and knowledge, and to them [the beasts] as their proper share we leave the essentiall, the manageable, and palpable goods, as peace, rest, securitie, innocencie, and health: Health, I say, which is the goodliest and richest present nature can impart unto us.[22]

Montaigne, of course, is referring to "that extraordinarily extensive and prolonged re-assertion of the rights of the senses, of the value of pleasure, of the excellence of this life on earth...[and] of the validity of the passions--that gusto for living" that predominated the art of the Renaissance.[23]

To the Christians, Montaigne's assertion of the validity of the passions would be viewed with apprehension for to them, a man governed by his passions is no longer human, but a monster. The naturalist writers, with one notable exception, however, did not consider the enjoyment of the senses an evil, for, in their minds, man was naturally good. In the minds of the naturalists, therefore, the natural beneficence of the human spirit would prevent human passions from becoming animalistic and monstrous.

The single exception to this attitude is Machiavelli, who attests in his writings to the presence of evil in human nature:

> I thinke the world hath continued alwayes in one manner, and that in it hath beene alwayes as much good as evill, but that that good and evill does

> change from country to country, as it appeares by that which is discover'd to us of those ancient kingdomes, which alter'd from one to th'other, by change of manners. But the world [in general] continued the same.[24]

Ultimately, Machiavelli's views are amoral and hence, for him, the world is "governed by largely unpredictable forces, and the share that may be predicted is limited to what...man can effect by 'seconding' Fortune."[25] For Machiavelli, therefore, the world is not ruled by reason and moral rectitude but is "subject to chance, rocked by fortune, and inhabited by wolves."[26] In such an animalistic world, the stakes are not salvation or redemption but preservation, through continuous success and survival, a theme on which Machiavelli expounds throughout his major writings. A brief passage from The Prince will serve to illustrate Machiavelli's position on this subject:

> He who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil.[27]

From this position, it naturally follows that a doctrine of expediency is necessary in order to succeed in a world governed by unpredictable Fortune, and Machiavelli advocates just such a philosophy in his Discourses, namely

> that men in their proceedings, and the rather in actions of consequence, should consider the times, and conforme themselves thereunto: and those that by their evill choice, or naturall inclination disagree with the times, most commonly live unhappily, and their actions have but ill success. The contrary befalls those, that can accord with the times.[28]

But like the other naturalists, Machiavelli ultimately asserts the primacy of nature as the governing principle of existence, for in following one's natural bent, the chances of success in mundane affairs are greater, or, as Machiavelli himself says, "he fayles least, and oftenest lights upon good successe, that meets (as I have sayd) time in its own way, and alwayes proceeds, according as his nature puts him forward."[29]

In King Lear, Edmund, Goneril and Regan are the major representatives of the naturalist position in that they all share the central principles of naturalism--an opposition to the traditional Christian values of duty, obedience and law, and an adherence to a free indulgence in a life of the senses. Of the three, however, Edmund is by far the most complex and fascinating character, for he directs his cunning intellect and naturalist attitudes toward the fulfillment of his own self-centered, malicious schemes. Edmund's ability to reason, his insights into human nature and his cunning evoke admiration from the spectator, in spite of his wickedness. But the practical employment of his talents instils us with terror for ultimately he is the embodiment of premeditated malevolence.

For Edmund, Nature is amoral: she recognizes none of the man-made laws which attempt to give order to her existence. "Thou, Nature, art my Goddess," he says,

> to thy law
> My services are bound. Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?

> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous and my shape as true,
> As honest madam's issue?
> (I, ii, 1-9)

This speech is Edmund's declaration in favour of the laws of Nature, and his condemnation of the orthodox attitudes toward bastards ("the plague of custom"). But if Edmund speaks the phrases of naturalism, he is above all a Machiavellian, one who proposes success as the sole justification for his actions:

> To both these sisters have I sworn my love,
> Each jealous of the other, as the stung
> Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
> Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoy'd
> If both remain alive: to take the widow
> Exasperates, makes mad her sister Goneril,
> And hardly shall I carry out my side,
> Her husband being alive. Now then we'll use
> His countenance for the battle, which being done,
> Let her who would be rid of him devise
> His speedy taking off.
> (V, i, 55-65)

Ultimately, Edmund attempts to become a self-made man, one who makes his own "fortune" in the world, and for this reason, he manages to engage our imagination. However, Edmund represents not just a philosophy, but one of the important facts of Elizabethan life and thought, and the engaging characterization which Shakespeare creates indicates the extent to which the naturalist position possessed his creative imagination. Shakespeare recognizes Edmund's energy and his vivacity, but at the same time, Shakespeare is aware of the sinister potentialities of the naturalist's philosophy, which he demonstrates with the animalistic characters of Goneril and Regan.[30] By Shakespeare's lifetime, the pervasiveness of the naturalists' position in the minds of his contemporaries had become a fact

which could no longer be ignored, and Shakespeare realized that the changes entailed by the existence of this "new philosophy" could not be reversed, and that the safe, secure world view of the Christian humanists was coming to an end.[31]

There Are Several Passages In 'King Lear' Which Indicate That The Universal Order Embodied In The Drama Is Not Merely "Out Of Joint" But That It Is, In Fact, Decaying Completely And Coming To An End.

Consider for a moment the following passages from the De Constantia of Justus Lipsius:

> It is an eternall decree, pronounced of the worlde from the beginning, and of all things Herein, to be born & to die; to begin and end. That supreme Iudge of all things, would have nothing firme and stable but himself alone....
>
> All these things which thou beholdest and admirest, either shall perish in their due time, or at least bee altered and changed: See thou the Sun? He fainteth. The Moone? She laboureth and languisheth. The Starres? They faile and fall. And howsoever the wit of man cloaketh and excuseth these matters, yet there have happened and daily do in that celestiall bodie such things as confound both the rules and the wittes of the Mathematicians.
>
> But beholde our Astrologers were sore troubled of late with strange motions, and new starres. This very yeare there arose a star whose encreasing and decreasing was plainly marked, and we saw (a matter hardly to be credited) even in the heaven itself, a thing to have beginning and end againe....
>
> And if these great bodies which to us seem everlasting, bee subject to mutabilitie and alteration, why much more shoulde not townes, commonwealthes and kingdoms;...As each particular man hath his youth, his strength, olde age, and death. So fareth it with other bodies. They begin, they increase, they stand and flourish,and all to this ende, that they may decay....

> Yea, and that which is more (and never ynough) to be marvelled at, this world having now been inhabited these five thousand and five hundred yeeres, is at length come to his dotage:...All things run into this fatall whirlepoole of ebbing and flowing: And some things in this world are long lasting, but not everlasting.[32]

These quotations embody, in capsule form, one of the most startling preoccupations of the Elizabethans, namely their intense interest in the precise age of the world and the perceptible indications of the decay of Nature. Such a belief was neither new nor uncommon: the sources for this interest were manifold and included both pagan and Judeo-Christian concepts. The belief that the world will decay and end can, in fact, be found in Plato and traced from him through Orpheus, Hesiod, and Dionysius the Areopagite, to Apollonius, the Church fathers, Joachim of Flora and Dante.[33] Among the Elizabethans, interest in the decay of Nature is pervasive, and may be found in the writings of Louis Le Roy, John Norden, Richard Greville, John Donne, Montaigne, Thomas Nashe, Richard Hooker and Edmund Spenser;[34] and always the elements and characteristics which we saw in Lipsius reappear again and again:

> Sun, moon, planets (strange conjunctions for example), comets, and other heavenly bodies and phenomena behaving aberrantly the four elements of fire, air, water and earth distraught and misbehaving; men shrunken in stature and unnatural in attitudes; states troubled by wars and civil strife; pestilence, famine, floods and conflagrations rampant everywhere etc., etc.[35]

And, of course, there were always references to the Biblical descriptions of interfamilial discord which was to have preceded the final holocaust that terminated the sub-lunary world.

What has just been described is, of course, the climate in which the events of King Lear take place. The world of King Lear, that is the univere itself, stands on the brink of ruin: all of the characteristics delineated in the passages above are vividly manifest in the play. There is the unnatural, animalistic behavior of Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Edmund. The storms scenes in Act III show the elements of earth, air, fire and water in a cataclysmic conflict. There are even rumours of wars and civil strife (II, i, 7-15). The speech which epitomizes this state, however, comes very early in the drama and, in effect, sets the mood for the rest of the play:

> GLOUCESTER. These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us....Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This Villain of mine comes under the prediction,--there's son against father.--The king falls from bias of nature, there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.
>
> (I, ii, 112-23)

This speech would indicate to Shakespeare's audience the exact state of Nature, in which the drama is unfolding, and render the themes of the play painfully immediate, because the cosmic events described by Gloucester would recently have been observed by most of the members of the audience.[36]

This disintegration of the natural order is vital for the intellectual and philosophical milieu of the play. Paradoxically, the Stoic and naturalist philosophies which we

examined earlier can only flourish in a world which is decaying and for which the followers of both philosophies see no hope of redemption. While the Stoics seek inner comfort and security as self-gratifying bulwarks against the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", the naturalists, operating on a pleasure-pain basis, attempt to squeeze from life the best existence possible. Both philosophies, therefore, center their concern on the relationship of the particular, or the individual, and the universal, through which they strive to discover the ultimate principles of human existence.[37] Both philosophies, however, are philosophies of desperation and despair because of the a priori necessity of seeing the universe in a state of unredeemable decay. Both philosophies, moreover, possess a nobility of sorts and have positive motivations but, ultimately the disintegrating milieu in which they must exist renders their message vacuous.[38] What possible significance can there be in Edmund's desire for success and social prominence in a kingdom on the verge of collapse? And surely the Stoic emphasis on endurance ("Men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither" (V, ii, 9-10)), must be equally empty in a world in which all signs indicate an imminent end to the universal order. Surely Kent sounds the most appropriate evaluation of everybody's situation when he claims, just before the termination of the drama, that "All's cheerless, dark, and deadly." (V, iii, 290)

The Presence Of Evil, In The Shape Of The Machiavellian Naturalists, Induces The Stoics To Re-Assess Their World View, And Finally Come To Question The Very Existence Of Divine Justice.

For Lear and his supporters in the play, the coexistence of another, conflicting world view confuses their understanding of the character of the natural order. Specifically, it is the presence of the Machiavellian naturalists--Cornwall, Goneril, Regan and Edmund--and their ability to prosper, which throws doubt on the nature of "Nature", in the minds of Kent, Albany, Edgar and Lear. Eventually, the doubt in the mind of Lear induces him to question the existence of divine justice and to reconsider the moral character of the universal hierarchy. Lear, therefore, finds himself caught in a dilemma: the gods, he believes with Edgar, are just, but he is unable to escape the fact that "the whoreson must be acknowledged," (I, i, 24) that is to say, Edmund and the world view he represents must be acknowledged. In other words, Lear believes in the orthodox humanist world view, but brute empirical evidence confronts him with the existence of evil and the events of the drama only serve to confirm its presence and its ability to operate successfully in human affairs.

At numerous points in the drama, Lear prays to the gods for justice, and so demonstrates his faith in providence and the beneficence of the divine order, a tenet fundamental to Christian humanism. The reply Lear believes he hears, is silence. Although this fact disturbs his faith, it does not shatter it, and until the third act, Lear continues to express

some sort of faith in the orthodox world view, until he is confronted with the undeniable, physical contradiction to this philosophical outlook in the shape of Tom O'Bedlam--Edgar. It is then that his sanity is shattered.[39]

Up to that point, Lear endures the ingratitude of Cordelia, Goneril and Regan by continually affirming his faith in the orthodox world view. He refers to the actions of his daughters as "unnatural", which indicates that, in his opinion, their actions are alien to the natural order. Even during his storm-tossed night on the heath, in spite of the preceding actions of Goneril and Regan, Lear re-affirms his faith in the reality of divine justice:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp.
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the Heavens more just.
> (III, iv, 28-36)

The humanist optimism of this speech, however, which asserts that the gods are more just than to deny man more than the bare necessities of existence, is promptly contradicted by the entrance of Edgar, disguised as Tom O'Bedlam. Gradually, Lear realizes that the figure before him is a concrete contradiction of the humanist attitude which he had just expressed. At first, Lear chooses not to believe his perceptions, but categorizes them instead with the actions of Goneril and Regan:

> LEAR. Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air
> Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT. He hath no daughters, sir.
LEAR. Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
To such lowness but his unkind daughters.
(III, iv, 68-72)

But finally he concludes:

Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.
(III, iv, 110-1)

At this point, Lear's faith is shattered and his sanity plunges into a dark, chaotic abyss, which will be more horrible, and more real, than the ingratitude of his daughters.

King Lear, as C.J. Sisson observes, is a play in which "the function of justice itself has come into question"[40] and this questioning of justice occurs several times in the drama, by several different characters. Gloucester's famous remark concerning the moral character of the gods (IV, i, 38-9) cries out against injustice, and Albany re-iterates the same fear in the next scene (IV, ii, 46-50). The formal affirmations of heavenly power by Albany, Edgar and Kent are a more subtle indication of disintegrating belief in the existence of the moral order. When Albany hears of the death of Cornwall, which is occasioned by the blinding of Gloucester, the orthodox duke cries:

This shows you are above,
You justicers, that these our nether crimes
So speedily can venge.
(IV, ii, 78-80)

Kent expresses a similar sentiment in the next scene when he comments on the common parentage of Cordelia, Goneril and Regan:

> It is the stars,
> The stars above us, govern our conditions,
> Else one self mate and mate could not beget
> Such different issues.
> (IV, iii, 34-7)[41]

Finally, there is Edgar's comment to Edmund that

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him [Gloucester] his eyes.
> (V, iii, 170-73)

Edgar's speech, like the others, demonstrates a visible uneasiness since he and Albany and Kent find it necessary to seize on every shred of evidence that supports their orthodox beliefs.[42]

The character of the moral order in King Lear, and in fact, the very nature of "Nature" itself, is an uncertainty, especially for the adherents of orthodox humanism, since their experiences demonstrate, and confirm, the existence of a horrifying set of contradictions, not the least of which is the presence and success of unpunished malevolence. Ultimately, therefore, the Stoics in the play discover that the moral order of their world is not one in which man participates creatively. Man's role, they discover, is one of endurance, or survival: his reward is not in heaven but in death--the only release from the afflictions of mundane fortune.[43]

Whatever The Government Of The Universe In 'King Lear', It Is Definitely Not Guided By The Principle Of Punishment And Destruction For The Wicked, And Prosperity And Preservation For The Good.

The final catastrophe of King Lear should raise in the mind of the spectator several retrospective questions, not the

least of which concerns the character of the moral order. The deaths of Gloucester, Cordelia and Lear compel the spectator to consider for himself in what type of universe such wasteful death could be the consequence of the complete suffering which precedes it.[44] That the characters who remain alive at the final curtain all represent "the good" (as opposed to the evil of Goneril and Regan) is of course a fact. To construe from this, however, that King Lear demonstrates the triumph of good over evil and advocates the propriety of orthodox, Renaissance humanism would be an error in perception. On the whole it would be much more proper to conclude that, by the end of the play, nobody has triumphed over the others, but that the characters who remain have somehow managed to endure.

The question of Shakespeare's moral position in King Lear is a problem almost as old as the play. It is probable that Samuel Johnson was thinking of King Lear when he wrote that Shakespeare

> sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose....he makes no just distribution of good and evil, nor is [he] always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance.[45]

Georg Brandes takes Johnson's position one step further when he remarks of King Lear that

> Shakespeare has nowhere else shown evil and good in such immediate opposition--bad and good human beings in such direct conflict with each other; and nowhere else has he so deliberately shunned the customary

> and conventional issue of the struggle--the triumph of the good. In the catastrophe, blind and callous Fate blots out the good and bad together.[46]

In a more recent study entitled "The Coinage of Man: King Lear and Camus's L'Etranger", Morris Weitz indirectly explores the moral character of the King Lear universe, in relation to his central interest of human worth. The title of Weitz's article betrays the obvious existentialistic bias of his thinking but it would be rather dogmatic, and peremptory, to assume that his perspective of the play is consequently of limited value.

Weitz contends that the most remarkable characteristic of the King Lear universe is "that good and evil are absolute and that though evil destroys good, it too is destroyed.... And it is remarkable precisely because Shakespeare dissolves this simple, absolute good and evil into the ambivalence of all value in a morally indifferent universe."[47] The only justification Weitz provides for this position, however, is that the plot would seem to support this view.[48] As a critic, Weitz can hardly be excused for not verifying this position more extensively, despite the fact that his main interest lies elsewhere.

For Weitz, the presence of a morally indifferent universe becomes a fact against which Shakespeare considers the major themes of the drama. Weitz's investigation, moreover, is chiefly concerned with Shakespeare's portrayal of the actual worth of man in relation to a morally indifferent universe, and with the existence of justice and human value within the

same condition. The fundamental perspective of his article, therefore, becomes little more than an assumption which his existentialistic predilections do not find incongruous with his reading of the text.

However faulty Weitz is in his argument, there is, nevertheless, a considerable amount of validity to his characterization of the world of King Lear. The plot does to a great extent substantiate the view that the universe is governed by powers which are "morally indifferent". The good characters suffer humiliation, insults and degradation along with physical and mental mutilation, while for most of the play the wicked grow and prosper until it seems in fact that the gods are standing up for bastards. In the end, the demise of the wicked is more frequently effected by their own evil than by the triumph of one of the good characters; while time after time, throughout the play, the characters associated with the orthodox concepts of goodness are duped, betrayed or destroyed by those who represent "orthodox evil". From the opening scene of the drama until the old King enters carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms, Gloucester's famous remark echoes throughout the events of the drama in numerous images of that horror:

> As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
> They kill us for their sport.
> (IV, i, 38-9)

The Apparent Indifference Of The Divine Hierarchy Toward The Actions of Goneril And Regan Becomes The Point Of Inception For Lear's Metaphysical Investigation Of The Human Condition.

Throughout the events of the drama, Lear personally implores the divine powers, as the "gods", "the Heavens" or "Nature", to avenge the injustices enacted upon him by his two elder daughters. The response of the divine forces, however, is apparently a passive silence. The ingratitude of Goneril and Regan, therefore, compounds itself until Lear's conception of the universal order becomes so enveloped in doubt that Lear loses his faith in the gods completely. Lear, in disillusion, attempts to recover his sanity in three ways. He tries to comprehend the nature and worth of humanity. He tries to resolve the problem of evil. And last of all, he tries to verify the existence of divine providence. But it is the fact that the divine forces do not respond to his invocations for assistance that inaugurates Lear's disillusionment and motivates his ensuing, metaphysical investigation of humanity.

To the critics who prefer to read King Lear in terms of Christian theology, Lear's dilemma is yet another instance of his faulty judgement for, instead of dwelling in an indifferent, impersonal divine order, Lear in fact acts "within the boundaries of a beneficent...divine order" in which "the wheels of retribution move irrevocably, quickly, impartially, but compassionately."[49] Lear's dilemma, therefore, is only a monstrous delusion which Reason should have helped him to avoid, were it not eclipsed by his ireful passions. To what-

ever extent we may argue that this perspective violates the sense of the play, its suggestion that Lear is incorrect in his assessment of the moral character of the cosmos is surely anterior to the development of the drama. Whether or not Lear is correct in his doubts concerning the existence of divine providence is not an issue in the play. The fact remains that Lear believes the gods are indifferent toward his suffering. The sympathetic spectator, consequently, is swept along involuntarily in the wake of Lear's emotional turmoil.

Lear's assessment of the constitution of the universe is empirical: he himself observes the silence of the gods to the imprecations of the king—himself—their earthly representative, and consequently his faith in orthodox doctrine is shaken. This progression from faith to despair is very clear in a crucial scene in Act II, where, for the first time since his abdication, Lear confronts both Goneril and Regan. Lear forswears the company of Goneril when she attempts to deprive him of half his retinue, and seeks instead the company of Regan, only to find that Goneril has followed him. When he hears of the imminent arrival of his eldest daughter, he implores the gods to take his part in the confrontation which must surely follow:

> O Heavens,
> If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
> Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
> Make it your cause. Send down, and take my part!
> (II, iv, 192-5)

Much to the chagrin of Lear, however, the gods do not take his part but appear instead to be hostile, as Goneril and Regan

rationalize with the old King until they insist that it is no longer feasible for Lear to retain a retinue of one hundred knights. When Lear realizes that he is being stripped of his retainers, he flies into a rage and finally cries to the gods:

> If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
> Against their father, fool me not so much
> To bear it tamely.
> (II, iv, 277-9)

The change in attitude from prayer to reproach is a critical one. By considering that the divine powers themselves are the source of his daughters' wickedness, Lear must have already concluded that the divine order is at least arbitrary toward human suffering.

Following this confrontation with his daughters, Lear quits their presence, to spend a night on the storm-tossed heath, remarking, as he goes, that

> I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
> Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad.
> (II, iv, 287-9)

During the storm, an external reflection of Lear's inner turmoil, the old King broods on his daughters' ingratitude. He tries in vain to reconcile it with his understanding of the human condition:

> I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness.
> I never gave you kingdom, called you children,
> You owe me no subscription.
> (III, ii, 16-18)

But out of this problem grows Lear's madness, and in that state, Lear reconsiders his understanding of the nature and worth of man, and the existence of divine providence. The

former is occasioned by the meeting with Edgar, the condition of whom Lear perceives as the result of ingratitude: "Hast thou given all to thy two daughters?" he asks of Edgar, "And art thou come to this?" (III, ii, 49-50) The unaccommodated condition of Edgar, moreover, instigates Lear's reconsideration of the nature of man (III, ii, 104ff.), but, at the same time, there occurs a re-evaluation of the relative worth of humanity in all of its manifestations. This quest has its climax in the trial scene (III, vi), in which Lear's impatience for the proper dispensation of justice reaches the point where he himself "will arraign them [Goneril and Regan] straight." (III, vi, 22) The continuing prosperity of his wicked daughters and his disillusionment at their unorthodox behavior have driven him into a state of madness, in which he seeks retribution by himself instead of relying on the gods to dispense justice. The irony of this trial, however, lies in its futility: Lear is powerless to dispense any punishment against the wicked, a situation exemplified by the fact that the trial is conducted by a madman, a lunatic and a fool. Lear is able to recognise injustice and articulate its evil, but he must continue to suffer its existence. His quest for justice therefore continues throughout the events of the play, and even at the close of the drama, Lear is unable to reconcile what he has always believed to exist, namely divine retribution, with what he has recently experienced:

> And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
> And thou no breath at all?
> (V, iii, 305-7).

Lear, at this point, once again articulates the incongruity between his faith in divine justice and his experience with the fact of injustice and evil. Like all the critics who have examined the play, Lear is unable to reconcile the death of Cordelia with the orthodox doctrine of punishment for the wicked and reward for the good, and as a result, this last question of Lear devastates any pattern of cosmic justice which may have been operating superficially on the events of the drama.[50]

In Spite Of The Events In The First Scene Of Act V, Where Lear And Cordelia Are Joyfully Re-United, The Final Comment On The Themes Of Justice And Decay, And On The Character Of The Universe, Must Surely Be Made By The Final Catastrophic Scene Of The Play.

No one event in King Lear has aroused more critical speculation than the death of Cordelia in the last scene of the drama. Almost every scholar who has written extensively on King Lear has, at one time or another, sought to explain the significance of the final entrance of Lear, bearing the body of the dead Cordelia. Does Lear die happy, under the illusion that Cordelia still lives? How can the death of Cordelia be reconciled with any patterns of poetic or cosmic justice? How does the final scene confirm Lear's spiritual redemption? Does the death of Cordelia re-inforce the reality of the evil

embodied in Goneril and Regan? What form of relief does this spectacle afford the audience? And ultimately, what is portrayed in this final scene--the restoration of universal order, or a final confrontation with chaos? All of these questions have been raised at one time or another in relation to the closing events of King Lear. And in spite of the mountain of scholarly speculation, it is unlikely that we are any closer to answering these questions today than we were before.

For many years, A.C. Bradley's assertion that Lear dies in an ecstasy of joy thinking that Cordelia lives was universally accepted as true, although the only argument he gave for this opinion was that to read the ending otherwise would be unfaithful to Shakespeare's intentions.[51] In the last twenty years, however, this interpretation has been viewed with increasing scepticism, and has been rejected outright by a few critics.[52] The common denominator for most of these critics is the belief that Bradley emphasizes the wrong perspectives in his discussion of the play's ending. Carol L. Marks, for example, argues that criticism must first decide what is significant about the ending in relation to the rest of the drama. Surely, she says, any concern with who will inherit the kingdom after Lear dies is, like the death of Edmund, "but a trifle here." Instead, she argues it is "the extreme emotional force of Lear's death" which dominates the final lines of the play, and forces, into the background of the audience's consciousness, most concern

with the customary re-assertion of sublunary order.[53] Judah Stampfer contends that the underlying tension of the final scene "lies between an absolute knowledge that Cordelia is dead and an absolute inability to accept it."[54] In agreement with Miss Stampfer, H.W. Donner adds that if Lear dies happy, then all of the evil which the audience has witnessed would lose its impact and reality: it would not longer matter. Lear must die in agony, he says,

> lest we should forget the crimes that have been commited, the evil there is in the world and inhumanity; lest we should be tempted to condone crimes for which there can be no forgiveness; lest in our feeling of relief that Lear's sufferings are at length over we should forget what caused them; lest we should forget also the blinding of Gloucester and the treachery of Edmund.[55]

Ultimately however the nature of Lear's death, be it in agony or joy, rests upon the choice of the director who is transfering the script to the physical stage, in accordance with his understanding of the play. A director, however, cannot significantly alter the verbal and visual images the denouement of King Lear presents to the audience. And it is through these media that the play's ethical issues, and their relation to the universal hierarchy, are finally resolved.

In view of Lear's pre-occupation with the problem of divine justice, which we examined earlier, we expect that this final catastrophe should affect the old King's perceptions of human existence and cosmic justice. Certainly it would be fallacious to suggest that the death of Cordelia confirms Lear's, or even Edgar's, faith in divine justice: in fact, all

of the imagery suggests that just the opposite occurs. The first reactions to Cordelia's death come from Kent, Edgar and Albany, the three adherents of orthodoxy:

> KENT. Is this the promised end?
> EDGAR. Or image of that horror?
> ALBANY. Fall and cease.
> (V, iii, 263-4)

Obviously the spectacle before them visibly shatters their orthodox doctrines, and this upheaval is confirmed shortly thereafter when Albany responds to the announcement of Edmund's death with: "That's but a trifle here." (V, iii, 295) That Albany should react in such a manner to the destruction of so evil a figure as Edmund is a clear indication of how greatly the death of Cordelia has altered the man who had previously seen the machinations of divine justice in so many earthly events.

Lear's last speech gives the audience his attitude to the final catastrophe and, at the same time, provides us with his final perspective on the ethical issues which have plagued him for most of the drama:

> And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never!
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!
> (V, iii, 305-11)

Reading this passage out of context, and given the appropriate predispositions, we could see an expression of joy in the words "Look there, look there!": reading this last speech of Lear's in context, however, all but destroys any possibility of joy in his final words. His question of why a dog, a

horse or a rat should continue to live while Cordelia dies, suggests that Lear's final perspective of his predicament is pessimistic. This question indicates that for Lear, there occurs the agonizing recognition that the bestial world of the wicked sisters continues to exist while the good represented by Cordelia must pass from the world.[56] That such an evil should be thrust upon him at this stage in his life is a fact which Lear is unable to assimilate into any patterns of cosmic justice, and the very agony of this confrontation precipitates his death.

It would be difficult therefore to construct a case for the predominance of a benevolent universal order in King Lear. The text itself will not clearly support the possibility that, just before his death, Lear himself is able to perceive any of the processes of Providence operating in the closing events of the drama. Kent's comment: "Break, heart, I prithee break!" (V, iii, 312) suggests, moreover, that the Stoical duke has likewise been unable to see in the death of Cordelia the machinations of a benevolent cosmic order. And that same remark also suggests that Lear dies in agony since it is unlikely that, given his optimistic predispositions, Kent would respond with such an anguished comment if the old King passed away happy. If there is a benevolent universal hierarchy which propels the events of King Lear, the evidence suggests that Lear is not aware of it, and that Kent, Edgar and Albany are rather unsure of its presence.

It is this uncertainty in the minds of the surviving characters which accounts for the emotional effects of the drama's culmination. The suffering of Lear and the turmoil in England are at an end, and hence the audience is relieved of the emotional burden precipitated by the upheaval apparent in the play. But order and harmony are not apparent at the close of the drama. Albany resigns the throne, first to Lear, and then to Edgar and Kent: but Kent likewise resigns any claim to the throne of England (V, iii, 320-2), and it appears that Edgar, therefore, will become king. This fact, however, is hardly representative of the reassertion of a benign humane order blest by the gods. Edgar's easy, optimistic moralizing has continually been shattered by contradicting events and he is, at best, self-righteous, prissy and a little cold-blooded: Lear, even at his worst, is completely magnificent.[57] The culmination of the play's action, therefore, a spiritual conflict in a world permeated with decay, provides the spectator with relief, but with no sense of order, harmony or healing. The extreme emotional turmoil of Lear, which completely dominates the action after his final entrance, is at an end. The emotionally charged conflict, with its cosmic implications, is finally over and no one side has ultimately triumphed. Granted the evil characters are all dead, but so are many of the good ones. And surely the significance of Edgar's momentary triumph over the evil Edmund is erased by the final entrance of Lear "with Cordelia dead in his arms." The spectator therefore is left with a feeling of emotional

relief, and with the closing words of the Duke of Albany--words which give no indication of order or healing, but are, in effect, an epitaph for Lear, Cordelia, Edmund, England, and the universe:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most. We that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long.
> (V, iii, 323-6)[58]

CHAPTER III

THE SPECTACLE OF EVIL IN KING LEAR

The Crux Of Lear's Dilemma Lies In The Orthodox Humanist Belief That The Natural Order Emanates From The Gods.

In the previous chapter, we examined the conflicting world views of the two major philosophical movements of the seventeenth century, along with their manifestations in King Lear. The crux of the conflict in King Lear is embodied in these philosophies and, as we discovered, this conflict shatters the easy security of Lear's world view; an event which, in turn, instigates the re-evaluation of his metaphysical perspectives. In this chapter, I shall explore a consequent product of this meeting of orthodox humanism and Machiavellian naturalism, namely Lear's attempt to resolve the problem of the existence of evil, and its consequent relationship to the tragic vision of existence.

If the orthodox world view is accepted then the belief that everything in the natural order emanates from God, or in this case, the gods, must also be accepted. During a time when traditional philosophy begins to erode, and doubt invades

the thinking of men, a terrifying possibility emerges from the orthodox world view. If some part of the natural order is undeniably evil, then it must be concluded that this evil emanates from the source of the natural order, in this case, the gods. But, in the Renaissance humanist schema, God, or the gods, are beneficent and just, a priori; hence they should not be the source of evil. Nevertheless, should anyone assert that an evil aspect of the natural order is not emanating from the gods, then he is indulging in speculation which undermines the entire world view of orthodox Renaissance humanism. Therefore the possibility that the summit of the divine may be the source of mundane evil still remains as a possibility within the corpus of Renaissance humanist thought, and as a personal doubt is reinforced by empirical evidence of the existence of evil in the natural order, this possibility grows more immediate and more horrifying.

I contend that the pattern of thought described in the previous paragraph is present in King Lear and that in that play, Shakespeare is exploring the possibility that the gods, the summit of the universal order, may in fact be the source of evil in the natural order: in this chapter, I should like to explore this theme at length. I shall begin by examining the nature of evil and its relationship to the tragic vision of existence. Then I shall proceed to examine the theme of evil as it is presented in King Lear. We shall see how Lear first observes evil in the natural order and then must confront the possibility that it is the gods themselves who are

motivating the actions of his daughters. During this part of my investigation I shall explore the extent to which the problem of evil is connected with Lear's emotional sufferings, and also to what extent the problem of evil is related to the crux of the tragic vision of man's existence.

The Significance Of The Word "Evil" Varies According To The Context In Which It Is Used: "Evil", Therefore, Is A Term Which Constantly Requires Defining.

Given any number of expressions which contain a word denoting evil, it will be apparent that the significance of the word associated with evil varies from case to case. For example, in the phrase "an evil man", the word associated with the idea of evil is employed in a different manner from its use in the phrase "a bad book". In the former, the term "evil" suggests that the ethical nature of the individual is at variance with the norm and is therefore disruptive and dangerous; in the latter, the word "bad" suggests that there is something intrinsically flawed in the construction or execution of the work which thereby renders the book of poor quality. The variety of suggestions in such words as evil, bad, wicked or sinister, therefore necessitates, in the initial stages, a very broad definition of the idea of evil. Generally, therefore, evil is that which is undesirable, while good is the desirable:[1] or alternatively, evil is that which inhibits a realization of the good.

It is possible to give more shape to the idea of evil by pointing out that evil is never committed but rather it is an act performed upon somebody by another.[2] Evil, therefore, is embodied in an "action" (to use the term in its loosest sense): someone must perform an act which is evil in its result. For example, the evil involved in Adam's sin is not that he literally ate the apple but that his action embodied an act of disobedience and pride. An evil act, moreover, may be simply an act of the will, which is a basic precept of the Augustinian philosophy of evil, namely that an individual turns his will from an interest in God, to an interest in himself.[3]

Essentially, however, we still have a definition of evil which may be too general for Kantean moralists because there is nothing absolute or universal in our definition. It is a problem, moreover, which is largely unsolvable, for I find it impossible to name any action which has universally been accepted as evil at all times. Acts of murder, incest, robbery and even blasphemy, in certain cultural circumstances, have not been considered as evil actions. An action is evil, therefore, only when it is regarded as evil in the eyes of certain men, and in the language of certain men: some law, or understanding, is required which will define the limits of what is good as opposed to what is evil.[4]

In respect to King Lear, there are numerous occasions which "define" evil actions for certain characters. Some of these occasions, however, involve only implicit definitions of evil,

such as Albany's reprimands to Goneril for her treatment of Lear:

> O Goneril!
> You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
> Blows in your face.
> (IV, ii, 29-31)

Although he does not state explicitly that Goneril's actions are wicked, nevertheless it is safe to conclude that he considers them evil by the low opinion he holds of her worth. Edmund also demonstrates a distaste for an action which he defines as evil in his first soliloquy: there he queries:

> Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> [of social respect]
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother?
> (I, ii, 2-6)

Edmund's contempt for the social inhibitions stemming from his illegitimacy ("the plague of custom") is important to the drama for it ultimately motivates his actions in the early stages of the play.

The defining of evil is most important in relation to Lear, for the presence of a specific evil haunts him for most of the drama.

> Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
> More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
> Than the sea monster:
> (I, iv, 281-3)

Lear exclaims during his first confrontation with Goneril, and the persistence of this evil finally drives the old King mad, since the advent of that state is marked by Lear's question to the disguised Edgar: "Hast thou given all to thy two

daughters?/And art thou come to this?" (III, iv, 49-50) Because of the constant presence of references to ingratitude, especially in Act III the thematic climax of the play, we must investigate the extent to which evil is involved in Lear's tragedy; that is, we must try to determine the relationship between evil and the tragic vision of existence.

Most Critics Agree That The Conflict Between Good And Evil Is Crucial For Tragedy: And Of The Two, Evil Is More Important Than Good In The Tragic Vision Of Existence For,As Richard B. Sewall Observes, The Idea Of Evil Informs All Tragedy.[5]

The essence of tragedy is an elusive phenomenon for which there are as many theories as there are theorists. Most critics agree, however, that a pre-eminent theme of tragedy is the idea of evil, and its relation to the divine order and to mankind. Henry A. Myers, for example, calls tragedy "a spectacle of evil" which, paradoxically, delights the audience even though the idea of evil does not.[6] William Chase Greene, in his examination of the Greek tragedians, defines tragedy as a "spectacle of pain and evil [and suffering, which] arouses in us a strange delight and a new admiration for man's powers."[7] And Richard B. Sewall argues that tragedy presents "a view of the universe, of man's destiny and his relation with his fellows and himself, in which evil, though not total, is real, ever threatening, and ineluctable."[8] In these three quotations, we have those aspects of the tragic vision of existence which are mentioned most frequently. Tragedy, therefore, investigates the themes

of evil and suffering while paradoxically entertaining an audience with a dramatic spectacle in which man's relationship with the universal order is made manifest in a way which arouses terrible emotions and an admiration for human potential.

According to Sewall, the tragic vision of life surfaces when the questions of ultimate justice and human destiny are no longer answered by orthodox philosophy or theology.[9] If this is true, then it is small wonder that suffering plays such a prominent role in tragedy since it requires that man first be deprived of those systems of thought which have traditionally given his existence perspective and meaning. And nothing could be more inducive to suffering than to feel one's existence shrouded in doubt because the traditional consolations of life, namely philosophy and theology, are no longer able to verify the justice in current events. The orthodox systems of thought may assist in explaining the suffering provoked by particular events but they no longer provide the hero with help in ascertaining the justness of his suffering. Tragedy, then, "presents a spectacle of suffering that is explained, though not necessarily justified."[10] As a result, tragedy exists only in the enigmatic world of the sceptic, and whatever questions a tragedy raises, the answers provided by the drama are largely ambiguous.[11]

If traditional philosophy cannot answer the questions which certain events raise in the mind of the tragic hero, then the hero has no choice but to confront a higher authority, namely the summit of the divine order. But such an action can

become frustrating, for in a tragedy, some part of the overall action, great or small, proceeds from sources beyond the control of the participants, and these sources are very often the divine powers to whom the hero is appealing.[12] Ultimately, therefore, the hero will find himself asking the divine order to justify its own actions, a plea which will only reveal the penetration of divine power into the struggles of mortals and thereby frustrate the hero even more.[13] In his frustration, the tragic hero will discover his own involvement in evil: he will come to realize that what he does, what he must do, is somehow wrong, and that his choice in the matter is not "that of a clear good or clear evil; [but that] it involves both, in [an] unclear mixture, and [it therefore] presents a dilemma."[14]

The tragic sense of life, moreover, is a prephilosophy, partially formulated, partially felt and, according to Miguel de Unamuno, "not so much flowing from ideas as determining them".[15] The tragic vision, therefore, is not a systematic view of existence. It varies and fluctuates in degree. And it is primal, dealing with the very essence of human existence:

> It recalls the original terror, harking back to a world that antedates the conceptions of philosophy, the consolation of later religions, and whatever constructions the human mind has devised to persuade itself that its universe is secure. It recalls the original unreason, the terror of the irrational. It sees man as questioner, naked and unaccommodated, alone, facing mysterious demonic forces in his own nature and outside, and the irreducible facts of suffering and death.[16]

"The Tragic Vision Of The World," Says Paul Ricoeur, "Is Tied To A Spectacle And Not To A Speculation" For The Essence Of The Tragic Resists Transcription Into A Theory Since "The Tragic Myth Tends To Concentrate Good And Evil At The Summit Of The Divine."[17]

In an explanation of the phenomenon of evil, Paul Ricoeur gives an interesting perspective to the idea of tragedy. Granted much of what he says may sound familiar (especially his terminology), but in the course of his search for a hermeneutics of evil, Ricoeur discovers a unique relationship of themes and symbols gravitating around what he calls "the tragic myth", and absent from the other myths which treat of the origin and end of evil.

Ricoeur's study concerns Greek tragedy, from which he formulates a general "theory" of tragedy which invites application to later drama. Ricoeur is aware of the objections to this method but his reason for choosing it is valid: "Greek tragedy," he says

> is not at all an example in the inductive sense, but the sudden and complete manifestation of the essence of the tragic; to understand the tragic is to relive in oneself the Greek experience of the tragic, not as a particular case of tragedy, but as the origin of tragedy--that is to say, both its beginning and its authentic emergence.[18]

Tragedy, for Ricoeur, has two characteristics--the medium of drama, and a unique combination of themes. Both of these characteristics, Ricoeur suggests, have contributed to the difficulty in formulating a largely acceptable theory to define tragedy:

> It is of the essence of the tragic that it must be exhibited in a tragic hero, a tragic action, a tragic denouement. Perhaps the tragic cannot tolerate transcription into a theory which--let us say it immediately--could only be the scandalous theology of predestination to evil. Perhaps the tragic theology must be rejected as soon as it is thought. Perhaps also it is capable of surviving, as spectacle, all the destructions that follow upon its transcription into the plain language of speculation. This connection with a spectacle, then, would be the specific means by which the symbolic power that resides in every tragic myth could be protected.[19]

Ricoeur is careful, however, not to formulate a new theory of tragedy: instead he attempts to establish the hermeneutics of tragedy through which he is able to give this enigmatic phenomenon a unique character.

Aside from the specifically dramatic character of tragedy, this phenomenon embodies a unique combination of themes which are discretely non-tragic (nor specifically Greek) but become tragic through combination. The first of these themes may be found in the mythology of all cultures, every time that

> the initiative in fault is traced back into the divine and [everytime] that this divine initiative works through the weakness of man and appears as divine possession.[20]

In the mythology of any culture, there is always the possibility of locating the source of evil in the divine but for obvious reasons, this theme resists expression in anything but a symbolic form.[21] Because of its plastic medium, tragedy is able to preserve the symbolic power of this theme and, for this reason, the theme finds its most pronounced expression in tragic drama.

A second theme of tragedy is expressed in Greek by the word phthonos, "the jealousy of the gods": "the 'jealous' gods," says Ricoeur, "cannot endure any greatness beside theirs; man, then, feels himself thrust back into his humanity,"[22] that is, back into his "moira",[23] or his "lot" in life. In this theme lies the germ of the tragic conflict. The divine order establishes for man a limit to his accomplishments, a "fate" (to use the term loosely) which would bring upon him "the wrath of the gods" should he attempt to surpass it. This wrath of the gods, moreover, may be manifested in two ways. The jealous god, or, to call him by another name, "the wicked god" may make himself felt by an act of transcendent hostility; like the Erinys (Furies) in the Oresteia of Aeschylus. Or the wicked god may demonstrate his hostility to the hero by his absence, by abandoning the hero to his own resources.[24] This latter kind of "divine aggression" is that type evident in King Lear, where, as we saw earlier, the divine forces are continually deaf to the imprecations of Lear and thereby abandon the old King to his own resources.

A third theme of tragedy is "heroic greatness" which focuses on the character of the hero. The jealousy of the divine order will inhibit the freedom of the hero who, in turn, will react against phthonos and fate by trying to reach beyond his limitations. It is in this act of overreaching, then, in this act of hybris, that the protagonist achieves his heroic stature and the birth of the tragic paradox is complete. "Without the dialectics of fate and freedom," Ricoeur argues,

> there would be no tragedy. Tragedy requires, on the one hand,...hostile transcendence...and on the other hand, the upsurge of a freedom that delays the fulfillment of fate, in order to make it break out in a "denoument" where its fatal character is ultimately revealed.[25]

Ricoeur's "symbols" are expressed in Greek terms but they express ideas rather than define characteristics. It is not necessary, therefore, that the tragic themes be presented in exactly the same manner as they were in ancient Greece; that is, there is in the corpus of Elizabethan thought the potential for generating, in a specifically Elizabethan context, the tragic themes examined above. It is possible for an Elizabethan to feel the absence of the divine and thereby conclude that the divine order is, in fact, hostile toward his realization of "the good". And, as we have demonstrated in the previous chapter, this is precisely what happens with Lear: he feels the absence of the divine through its deafness to his imprecations for justice.

In an Elizabethan context, the theme of tragic overreaching, of trying to surpass predefined limitations, is portrayed as deviation from the established pattern of the world view. In the Elizabethan world view, there are several concepts which define human limit: one of these is the concept of "finality", very often symbolized by man's mortality. In a social context, however, the application of "finality" is "vocation", a concept which defines men's limits, their moira or "lot" in life:

> the conviction that every man's duty, both to himself and to society, is fixed and established by God and nature, and that on the recognition of and

> obedience to that duty depend order in the state and his own happiness, is the very epitome of the [Renaissance] principles of limit.[26]

And nowhere is the responsibility for vocation more heavy than with the King, for a proper ruler must not forget to employ all of his powers for the benefit of society. The King, moreover, has no right to relinquish the vocation to which he has been summoned by God and Nature.[27] By stepping down from the throne, by laying aside the cares of state, and by dividing his kingdom, Lear attempts to overreach the limits of his "lot" in life, his moira: he violates the Renaissance law of vocation. In doing so, Lear alienates himself from the divine order, which abandons him to his own resources. Furthermore, he unleashes all of the chaotic powers embodied in Goneril and Regan in that he fails to maintain the principle of unity, and performs instead an act of fragmentation in complete violation of his divinely ordained duty as the King. This act, therefore, is Lear's hybris, his act of tragic overreaching (rather than of arrogant pride) which brings him into a confrontation with hostile transcendence and thereby creates the tragic predicament.

But the birth of tragedy, according to Paul Ricoeur, cannot occur

> until the theme of predestination to evil...comes up against the theme of heroic greatness; fate must first feel the resistance of freedom, rebound (so to speak) from the harness of the hero, and finally crush him, before the pre-eminently tragic emotion--phobos [Terror]--can be born.[28]

If tragedy were only the enactment of divine revenge against pride, then there could be no sympathy for the hero; none of the tragic emotions would be generated and the central figure

of the drama would not appear heroic. There would, in fact, be no drama at all. Tragedy is not simply the enactment of divine revenge and a re-affirmation of the limits the tragic hero sought to surpass. Tragedy requires that the hero feel fated to some evil; he must feel evil thrust upon him by the divine order. But such a theology is scandalous and heretical; and as such, it resists thought. The tragic theology, therefore, must be presented implicitly and symbolically so that it stirs the emotions of the audience into an awareness of the tragic predicament, without stirring them to speculation on the tragic paradox. As soon as the tragic theology is thought rather than felt, it will be rejected, for it is too scandalous for acceptance. For this reason, the tragic theology is implied in the words of the characters and enacted in dramatic form, so that the symbolic force of the tragic myth can be protected, and exercise its power on the emotional and volitional life of the audience. Our business, then, is to discover to what extent the theme of a wicked god, impelling evil on a tragic hero, operates in King Lear, and to what extent this idea contributes to Lear's emotional and mental suffering.

In 'King Lear', All Of The Characters Are Involved In A Conflict With Evil, But It Is Lear Who Finally Becomes Aware Of Ricoeur's Tragic Paradox.

There exists in King Lear a universe which generates evil in terrible profusion, and evidently, that same evil is able to thrive for most of the drama.[29] Eventually we must ask what kind of universal order could generate such evil,

and, as it turns out, this question is an important theme in the drama, and a crucial part of Lear's emotional agony.

Ironically, even those characters who are traditionally considered evil are involved in a conflict with malevolence. Goneril and Regan, for example, quarrel with each other for the possession of Edmund. Both of these wicked sisters see him as desirable, but Goneril views Regan's overtures to Edmund with displeasure while Regan reacts with jealousy to her sister's interest in Edmund. Edmund, on the other hand, views the interest of the wicked sisters with relative indifference, for he is more involved in overcoming an evil of his own: "Wherefore should I," he asks,

> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?
> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
> As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
> With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base, base?
> Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
> More composition and fierce quality
> Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,
> Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,
> Got 'tween asleep and wake?...
> . . . . . .
> Now, gods, stand up for bastards!
> (I, ii, 2-22)

Clearly Edmund views with disapprobation the social laws and customs which prohibit his succession to high estate because of his bastardy. Any interest he may show in Goneril or Regan, moreover, is only to further his own desire to overcome the social evil forced upon him. It is ironic, surely, that Edmund, a central symbol of malevolence in the drama, should be involved in a personal conflict with evil, and it

is also remarkable that a character so deliberately wicked as Edmund should be so conscious of that same conflict.

But it is Lear himself who is most conscious of his involvment with evil, both in himself and from outside himself. Unlike the Stoical Edgar and Kent, who bear the afflictions of malevolence with apathy, Lear reacts to the presence of evil with an emotional outburst which is both terrifying and magnificent. Kent, for example, having been placed in the stocks by Cornwall, answers his affliction with the words:

> ...All weary and o'erwatched,
> Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
> This shameful lodging.
> Fortune, good night. Smile once more, turn thy wheel!
> (II, ii, 177-80)

When confronted with the cold malevolence of Goneril, however, Lear reacts with contempt and curses:

> Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear!
> Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful!
> Into her womb convey sterility!
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen, that it may live
> And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
> Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
> With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
> Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
> To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child!
> (I, iv, 297-311)

Robert B. Heilman argues that Lear and Gloucester are the genesis of evil in the play: and true to Ricoeur's tragic myth, the old King is aware of his involvement in the existence of evil:[30]

> But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter,
> Or rather a disease that's in my flesh
> Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
> A plague sore, an embossed carbuncle, [Goneril,]
> In my corrupted blood.
> (II, iv, 224-8)

This speech is not simply a confession of Lear's involvement with the existence of evil: it is also a realization that the evil he sees in his daughters is the natural product of his own frailties. The nature of Goneril is inherited from his own "corrupted blood", a fact which is permitted by certain aspects of the natural order--in this case, the father-daughter and king-subject relationships. At this point, therefore, Lear can see that the laws of Nature embody processes which permit the existence and transmission of evil from one source to another within the natural order.

But Lear is also aware of the presence of a transcendent force of evil operating in his existence; that is, Lear is conscious of the tragic predicament of human existence. Lear knows he helped to unleash the evil of Goneril and Regan by his "immoderation" in giving up the throne, but he sees in the natural order, another source of mundane evil, which compliments his own. And both of these sources are, if we are willing to use the expression, part of "the guiltiness of being."[31]

The possibility of evil in the natural order is not a unique theme with Shakespeare for it had been circulating among Renaissance thinkers for some time. Edmund Spenser touches on this theme in Book VII of The Faerie Queen, where he considers the uncertainty of Nature's character:

> Then forth issewed (great goddesse) great dame Nature,
> With goodly port and gracious Maiesty;
> Being far greater and more tall of stature
> Then any of the gods or Powers on hie:
> Yet certes by her face and physnomy,
> Whether she man or woman inly wer,
> That could not any creature well descry:
> For, with a veile that wimpled euery where,
> Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.
>
> That some doe say was so by skill deuized,
> To hide the terror of her vncouth hew,
> From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized;
> For that her face did like a Lion shew,
> That eye of wight could not indure to view.[32]

And one of the more eloquent treatments of this theme may be found in the writings of Montaigne, who states that

> That which grieveth me most is, that, counting the symptoms or affects of our evill, I see as many merely proceeding of nature, and such as the heavens send us, and which may properly be termed theirs, as of those that our owne surfet, or excesse, or misse-diet, or humane indiscretion confer upon us.[33]

Lear's initial reaction to the presence of evil, that is, to ingratitude, is to deny its place within the natural order, but, by degrees, he comes to wonder if in fact the nature of something can be evil and continue to survive. If it can, then the existence of divine justice comes into question and logically Lear must wonder if the gods themselves are in any way hostile toward him. This pattern of thought is the underlying tension of Lear's dilemma, which propels him into an abyss of emotional anguish and into contemplation on the uncertainty of being.

When Lear thinks he finds ingratitude in Cordelia, he naturally suggests that Cordelia's action is unnatural: "Therefore beseech you," he advises Burgundy,

> To avert your liking a more worthier way
> Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed
> Almost to acknowledge hers.
> (I, i, 213-6)

When Lear also meets with ingratitude from Goneril, he displays incredulity and asks Albany if this unkindness originates with him. Satisfied that it does not, Lear must accept its presence in Goneril and hence, after placing a curse on her, he storms out of the room and departs for Regan's castle because, as he says to her:

> Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
> Thee o'er to harshness....
> . . . . . .
> ...Thou better know'st
> The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
> Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.
> Thy half of the kingdom hast thou not forgot,
> Wherein thee I endowed.
> (II, iv, 173-83)

But, as in his assessment of Cordelia, Lear is mistaken, and calling his daughters "unnatural hags" (II, iv, 281), he quits their presence for the stormy night of his own speculations.

During his night on the heath, Lear must confront the problem of evil in all of its implications, and gradually this dilemma drives him mad. In his speculations, Lear attempts to rationalize the tragic paradox out of his understanding of human existence, but instead he finds his thoughts caught in a vicious circle which keeps bringing him back to a single, terrible question:

> Then let them anatomise Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?
> (III, vi, 80-1)

The wording of this question indicates that Lear is considering the possibility that evil, "these hard hearts", may be natural to his daughters and in doing so, he implicates the gods in the presence of evil for, according to Lear's world view, the natural order emanates from the gods.

If Lear Can See Evil Existing Within The Natural Order, Then By A Natural Progression, He Must Eventually Consider That Evil Emanates From The Gods Themselves.

If, as Francis Bacon asserts, "no-one can treat of metaphysics, or of the internal and immutable in nature, without rushing at once into natural theology,"[34] then Lear's investigation of the metaphysics of his existence must eventually focus on his relationship with the gods. And as a Humanist, Lear would agree that: "Those things which nature is said to do, are by diuine arte performed, vsing nature as an instrument."[35] In wrestling with the problem of evil in the natural order, therefore, Lear must logically contemplate the problem of evil in respect to his relationship with the gods, or alternatively, Lear must eventually confront the possibility that the evil he has been trying to understand is actually being impelled upon him by the gods. But this particular theology is, in addition to being scandalous, one which resists thought--it is felt rather than contemplated. Any speculation on this theology must be done on a symbolic or metaphorical level, in which the theology is implicit. For Lear, the symbols of this theology are his wicked daughters,

Goneril and Regan, and the malignant actions which they perform.

It is not long after Lear's first confrontation with his daughters that the old King feels the operation of transcendent malevolence, and immediately he voices his apprehensions in the form of a prayer:

> You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
> As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
> If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
> Against their father, fool me not so much
> To bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger,
> And let not women's weapons, water drops,
> Stain my man's cheeks!
> (II, iv, 275-81)

Later in the play, Lear again expresses the fear that he is in the possession of the gods who have impelled his involvement in evil, and again the symbols of this theology are his wicked daughters:

> Rumble thy belly full! Spit fire! Spout rain!
> Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.
> I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness.
> I never gave you kingdom, called you children,
> You owe me no subscription. Then let fall
> Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,
> A poor, infirm, weak, and dispised old man:
> But yet I call you servile ministers
> That have with two pernicious daughters joined[36]
> Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this. Oh, Oh! 'Tis foul.
> (III, ii, 14-24)

Throughout the third act, Lear continues to speculate on his daughters' ingratitude, and the more he does, the more he suffers emotionally, until at one point, he finds his speculations carrying him toward madness:

> In such a night
> To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.
> In such a night as this! O Regan, Goneril!
> Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all--

> Oh, that way madness lies, let me shun that,
> No more of that.
>
> (III, iv, 17-22)

It is a state, moreover, from which he had previously invoked the heavens to preserve him:

> Oh, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
> Keep me in temper. I would not be mad!
> (I, v, 41-2)

But Lear's resolve on this matter is shattered by the entrance of Edgar, "disguised as a madman", for the sight of this unfortunate beggar unsettles the old King's senses completely. Immediately, he returns to the theme of his daughters' ingratitude with the question: "Hast thou given all to thy daughters?/And art thou come to this?" (III, iv, 49-50), and again with: "What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?/Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?" (III, iv, 64-5) Gradually, Lear's speculation leads him to one, horrible conclusion concerning the nature of man:

> Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume.... Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.
>
> (III, iv, 104-12)

And Lear's assertion that "thou art the thing itself" must logically resonate with Edgar's own description of himself as Poor Tom

> Whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford[37] and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire, that hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew, set ratsbane by his porridge, made him proud of heart to ride

> on a bay trotting-horse over four-inched bridges,
> to course his own shadow for a traitor....Do poor
> Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes.
> (III, iv, 51-60)

Edgar's self-description at this point is ironic for it also delineates the predicament of Lear--a man pursued by the "foul fiend" of ingratitude, or by the wicked god. And Lear's mad ravings mirror the feigned madness of Edgar, both of which are reflected in the metaphor of the storm--the external expression of their emotional turmoil.

Lear, however, is not the only character in the play who feels the presence of divine malevolence. The Earl of Gloucester also senses the presence of divine hostility, and in the despair which follows his blinding at the hands of Cornwall and Regan, he makes the most famous comment on this theme in King Lear:

> As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
> They kill us for their sport.
> (IV, i, 37-8)

Just before he attempts to take his life, Gloucester prays to the gods, and, implicitly, he again acknowledges their role in his afflictions:

> O you mighty gods!
> This world I do renounce, and in your sights
> Shake patiently my great affliction off.
> If I could bear it longer and not fall
> To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
> My snuff and loathed part of nature should
> Burn itself out.
> (IV, vi, 34-40)

Surprisingly, even the Duke of Kent attributes the origin of mundane evil to the divine order, and, like the statements of Gloucester, his is an expression of despair,

for he cannot explain the existence of evil in any other way: "It is the stars," he says,

> The stars above us, govern our conditions,
> Else one self mate and mate could not beget
> Such different issues. [Goneril, Regan and Cordelia]
> (IV, iii, 34-7)[38]

The presence of this statement and those of Gloucester, is important to the portrayal of the theme of divine malevolence for these remarks are made at points in the drama where Lear is absent from the action. These statements by Gloucester and Kent, therefore, serve to keep the theme of the wicked god in the consciousness of the audience, while the events which appear to support this theme are enacted before the spectator.

Of the characters who feel the presence of divine evil, it is Lear who is most affected by the possibility of wicked gods, to the extent that he eventually goes mad. During this period of madness, Lear, "reconsiders" the metaphysics of his existence, speculating (even if vainly) on divine providence, mortality and the nature of man. But eventually, Lear returns to the same enigmatic theme--the issue of his daughters' ingratitude, which he can in no way reconcile with his established world view. When Gloucester, for example, disobeys the expressed wishes of Cornwall and Regan by giving the old King shelter, Lear capitalizes on the situation by staging a mock trial of Goneril and Regan, in which he "will arraign them straight." (III, vi, 22) Symbolically, however, and ironically, Lear's mental images of Goneril and Regan escape the process of justice and hence Lear returns to speculation

on an old theme: "Then let them anatomise Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts." (III, vi, 80-2)

The mad ravings which follow the mock trial are a semi-conscious reconsideration of the inscrutable aspects of existence, expressed in metaphors whose logic is madness. But in the fibre of Lear's mad ravings the haunting problem of his daughters' ingratitude weaves a discernable thread, to which the old King's speculations continually return. At times, Lear's brooding on his daughter's actions is vaguely mixed in with other ideas such as court politics, as in the following passage:

> They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had
> white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were
> there. To say "aye" and "no" to every thing I
> said!...When the rain came to wet me once and
> the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would
> not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there
> I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their
> words. They told me I was everything, 'Tis a lie,
> I am not ague-proof.
>
> (IV, vi, 97-107)

But at other times, Lear's speculations on his daughters' ingratitude are much more explicit:

> I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?
> Adultery?
> Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery! No:
> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight.
> Let copulation thrive, for Gloucester's bastard son
> Was kinder to his father than my daughters
> Got 'tween the lawful sheets.
>
> (IV, vi, 111-18)

Eventually, however, Lear's mental agony is soothed by his re-union with Cordelia, for her human compassion and

benignity restore peace to the old King's beleaguered mind: and this tranquility is not even upset by his defeat in battle and captivity at the hands of Edmund. Lear's two speeches before he is carried off to prison (V, iii, 8-19 and 20-26) demonstrate a lack of uneasiness concerning his predicament, and re-affirm the joy he has discovered in his re-union with Cordelia. There is a remark in the latter speech, however, which resonates with the theme of the wicked god and indicates that, although this problem no longer presses on Lear's imagination, it has, nevertheless, not been completely resolved. "He that parts us," says Lear, "shall bring a brand from Heaven,/And fire us hence like foxes." (V, iii, 22-3) In expressing this sentiment, Lear ironically locates the action of the events which follow (that is, the death of Cordelia) within the context of divine malevolence, thereby leaving himself susceptible to the return of doubts and emotional agony. And the subsequent death of Cordelia produces just such an effect in Lear's mind, that is, pain, bewilderment and despair; all of which are expressed by the profound, yet unanswerable question which Lear asks just before he dies:

> And my poor fool is hanged' No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never!
> (V, iii, 305-8)

Lear dies a "ruined piece of nature", unable to resolve the problem of divine malevolence, for, in view of the events of the drama, he cannot deny the possibility of a wicked god and yet he finds that possibility unavowable. For Lear, the

possible presence of divine evil produces unbearable agony and bewilderment, a state from which he finds relief only in death, the ultimate release from the pain and uncertainty of human existence.

"Is The Tragic Theology Thinkable? The Tragic Drama Does Not Work It Out Reflectively; It Exhibits It By Means Of The Characters In A Spectacle, In The Vestments Of Poetry, And Through The Specific Emotions Of Terror And Pity."[39]

Tragedy exists in the emotional and volitional life of man, and the tragic paradox affects those aspects of human existence. But if the emphasis in tragedy is on feeling, rather than speculation, then ultimately tragedy is not concerned with the business of ethical denunciation and reform, for "the exegesis of moral evil is so much a part of ...[tragedy's] theological exegesis that the hero is shielded from moral condemnation and offered as an object of pity."[40] And because of the theme of the wicked god, tragedy is not concerned with the forgiveness of sins--in fact, such a concern is antagonistic to the tragic vision of existence.[41] The same is true for the idea of salvation, which would finally terminate the tragic paradox and undermine the essential function of the tragic predicament. The business of tragedy, therefore, is suffering; or, more specifically, "suffering for the sake of understanding."[42] But in order to precipitate such suffering, the heroic spirit of the protagonist must resist the impulses of divine malevolence and, to paraphrase

Lear, take upon himself the mystery of things as if he was God's spy. The result of this suffering is tragic knowledge for the hero--knowledge of himself; knowledge of the existence of the inscrutable; knowledge of the presence of divine malevolence; and finally, the knowledge that one's moira, or fate, includes the inability to transcend the inscrutable or to escape the wicked god.

A concrete example should illustrate these ideas more clearly. Consider, for example, the figures of Edmund and Lear. Both characters feel that evil is being thrust upon them, but the character of Edmund never attains the tragic proportions of Lear's character. In spite of his fascinating cunning, and his ability to engage our imaginative sympathies, Edmund never achieves the magnificence of Lear: Edmund's intellectual response to oppressive social custom is intriguing, but Lear's reaction to evil displays the grandeur of his spiritual nature and the depths of emotional responses which he is capable of sounding. Edmund, ultimately, engages the interest of the spectator but Lear is able to elicit sympathy and compassion from the spectator, who in the end shares in the emotional experience of the old King.

The difference between the two characters arises from their respective divergent world views which precipitate the resistance of evil in different ways. Edmund accepts the presence of evil as a fact and proceeds to exercise his cunning in order to circumvent a situation which he finds socially oppressive: "Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit./All

with me's meet that I can fashion fit." (I, ii, 199-200) This approach ultimately denies Edmund any considerable heroic stature, for Edmund becomes a portrait of pure cunning, which can hardly be described as heroic. Lear, on the other hand, reacts to the perception of evil with an incredulity which leads him to questions for which he can find no answers. In response to Cordelia's apparent ingratitude, he asks: "But goes thy heart with this?" (I, i, 106) and when confronted with Goneril's ingratitude, Lear's first response is to ask: "Are you our daughter?" (I, iv, 238). Finding this issue inscrutable, Lear proceeds to question his own understanding with an ironic series of queries:

> Doth any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> . . . . . .
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?
> (I, iv, 246-50)

Lear's last question here is a request for self-knowledge, and in seeking this, Lear embarks on a quest for knowledge which will eventually carry him beyond the limits of ordinary humanity to a heroic confrontation with the gods themselves. The tragic paradox is now complete. The wickedness and wrath of the gods is confronted by Lear's heroic spirit which resists their impulses to evil, and so extends Lear's suffering until it reaches an unbearable climax with Cordelia's death. Against the wicked gods, therefore, stands the heroic greatness of Lear, who refuses to accept the limitations of his earthly existence.

Lear wants his world view affirmed but he finds

instead, vivid contradictions to his faith--specifically in the ingratitude of his wicked daughters. And his brooding on this subject eventually unsettles his sensibility and he goes mad. In his madness, Lear continues to ask questions for which he cannot find answers, but at the same time, these questions arouse a sense of pathos which in turn elicits sympathy from the spectator. This development can be seen in the following series of questions, taken from progressive parts of the drama:

> Hast thou [Edgar] given all to thy daughters?
> And art thou come to this?
> (III, iv, 106)

> Is man no more than this [such a poor, bare,
> forked animal as thou art]?
> (III, iv, 106)

> What is the cause of thunder?
> (III, iv, 160)

> See how yond Justice rails upon yond simple thief?
> ...Change places and handy-dandy, which is the
> Justice and which is the thief?
> (IV, vi, 153-7)

Lear's questions indicate the philosophical issues which plague his mind, and the questions are, as Edgar describes them: "matter and impertinency mix'd./Reason in madness." (IV, vi, 178-9) During his re-union with Cordelia, Lear's mind is at rest, and all of the philosophical problems which had previously tortured him, are overpowered by the joy he discovers in Cordelia's love. But with her death, all of Lear's beliefs are again shattered, and the agony and emotional turmoil of his madness returns, along with the sublime pathos focused on Lear's last question: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life/And thou no breath at all?" (V, iii, 306-7)

Like many of Lear's previous questions, this one has no logical answer and therefore it serves as an appropriate expression of Lear's dilemma. Lear's questions have attempted to fathom the inscrutable problems which plague mankind in times of doubt, but his predestined failure does not detract from the grandeur of his heroic spirit, which is revealed through the medium of Lear's ill-fated quest. Even in failure, and in recognition of his own error, Lear arouses the sympathies of the spectator, who shares in the pathos of the tragic predicament, for

> the tragic vision, when it remains true to its "type", excludes any other deliverance than "sympathy," than tragic "pity"--that is to say, an impotent emotion of participation in the misfortunes of the hero, a sort of weeping with him and purifying [of] the tears by the beauty of song.[43]

The tragic hero, as well as the spectator, is not delivered <u>from</u> the tragic paradox but finds deliverance <u>within</u> the tragic paradox, through the acquisition of tragic knowledge, and an ultimate end to tragic suffering--either in submission to the will of the divine, or in death. The tragic predicament, however, remains intact: it is worked out on a symbolic level by means of a spectacle in which the spectator participates emotionally. But even at the close of the drama, there is the sympathetic, yet painful awareness of the tragic predicament of life--that is, of the potential grandeur of the human spirit; of the limitations of the human condition; and of the unavowable presence of divine malevolence and the terrible wrath of the gods.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

[1]Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1905), p.247.

[2]Ibid., p.262. This attitude is essentially repeated, and expanded, by Robert B. Heilman in "The Unity of King Lear," Critiques and Essays in Criticism: 1920-1948, ed. by Robert W. Stallman (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), p.157.

[3]Shakespearean Tragedy, p.260.

[4]Ibid., p.264.

[5]Ibid., pp.273-4.

[6]Ibid., p.279.

[7]"The Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation," The Life and Works of Charles Lamb, 8 vol. (New York: Lamb Publishing Company, 1889), V, pp.316-7.

[8]Shakespearean Tragedy, p.247.

[9]Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, 4 vol. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), II, p.3.

[10]Ibid., p.1.

[11]Ibid., p.4

[12]Ibid., p.5

[13]Ibid., p.6

[14]Ibid., p.53. This position was first argued by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Shakespearean Criticism, 2 vol., ed. by T.M. Raysor (London: J.M. Dent, 1907), I, p.53.

[15]This opinion is also expressed by Helen L. Gardner in King Lear, John Coffin Memorial Lecture, 1966 (London: Athlone Press, 1967), p.6, by D.G. James, in The Dream of Learning: An Essay on "The Advancement of Learning", "Hamlet" and "King Lear" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p.101 and by William Frost, in "Shakespeare's Rituals and the Opening of King Lear," Hudson Review, 10, 4, pp.582-3.

[16]For an interesting rebuttal to this approach, see Sylvan Barnet, "Some Limitations to a Christian Approach to Shakespeare," Journal of English Literary History, 22(1955), pp.81-92 and Laurence Michel, "The Possibility of a Christian Tragedy," Thought, 21(1956), pp.403-28.

[17]King Lear, W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture, Nov. 27, 1938 (Glasgow: Jackson, 1940), p.49.

[18]The Golden World of 'King Lear', Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy, 32(1946), p.26.

[19]"Shakespeare's Imagery: The Diabolic Images in Othello," Shakespeare Survey, 5(1952), p. 78. See also his Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (Durham, N.C. Duke University Press, 1944), pp.52-61.

[20]Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York: New York University Press, 1957), pp.185-6. See also his "Adversity and the Miracle of Love in King Lear," Shakespeare Quarterly, 6(1955), pp.325-36.

[21]The other proponents of this position are as follows: Hardin Craig, "The Ethics of King Lear," Philological Quarterly, 4(1925), pp.97-109; John Dover Wilson, Six Tragedies of Shakespeare: An Introduction for the Plain Man (London: Longmans, Green, 1929); John M. Lothian, King Lear, a Tragic Reading of Life (Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1949); John F. Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of 'King Lear' (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), pp.40,135; Johannes Alghaier, "Is King Lear an Antiauthoritarian Play?" Publications of the Modern Language Association, 88(1973), pp.1033-9; Ivor Morris, Shakespeare's God: The Role of Religion in the Tragedies (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972); Peter Milward, Shakespeare's Religious Background (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973).

[22]The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New Essays, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1949), pp.190-1.

[23]Ibid., p.194.

[24]The major proponents of this position are Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion, original ed. 1930 (London: Barnes & Noble, 1967), Oscar James Campbell, "The Salvation of Lear," ELH, 15(1948), pp.94-108, Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), and Danby, p.135.

[25]Campbell, Tragic Heroes, pp.175ff.

[26]Ibid., p.3.

[27]Campbell, "Salvation of Lear," p.96.

[28]Ibid., p.95.

[29]Ibid., p.94

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid., pp.105,107.

[32]Ibid., p.107.

[33]Ibid., p.108.

[34]'King Lear' and the Gods (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1966), p.3.

[35]Ibid., p.335.

[36]Ibid., pp.3-8.

[37]Ibid., p.335.

[38]Ibid., p.63.

[39]The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, Cordella, Malone Society Reprint, 1907 (London: Simon Stafford, 1605), pp.1655-8.

[40]Granville-Barker, Prefaces, II, p.28.

[41]Gods, p.37.

[42]Ibid., p.82.

[43]The text I have chosen for this study is that of G.B. Harrison (ed.) in Shakespeare: The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1948), pp.1140-83. Harrison is a competent scholar who follows quite closely the Folio version of King Lear, which W.W. Greg argues is the more definitive text (The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp.375-88. In this thesis, all textual references have been compared to the Folio reading of King Lear and any significant alterations are recorded in the footnotes. All future textual references to King Lear will be made in the body of the thesis, using the standard Act, Scene, Line number(s) format.

[44]Elton, pp.77,37.

[45]Ibid., pp.42-56.

[46]Ibid., p.116.

[47]Ibid., p.58.

[48]Ibid., pp.147-9.

[49]Ibid., p.60.

[50]Ibid., pp.260-2.

[51]Ibid., p.336.

[52]Ibid., p.338.

[53]Critical Quarterly, 2, 4,pp.325-39.

[54]Ibid., p.326.

[55]Ibid., p.329.

[56]Shakespearean Tragedy, p.327.

[57]Quoted in Everett, p.329.

[58]Ibid., p.328.

[59]Ibid., p.332.

[60]This point is reiterated by Miss Helen Gardner in her pamphlet King Lear, pp.19-20. Unlike Miss Everett, however, she maintains that it is in complete error to approach King Lear in this manner.

[61]Everett, p.334.

[62]Ibid., pp.335-6.

[63]Ibid., pp.336, 339.

[64]This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear, first published Baton Rouge: 1948 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p.28.

[65]Ibid., p.177.

[66]Ibid., p.8.

[67]Ibid., p.289.

[68]This theme is the subject of a more intensive investigation at the beginning of the next chapter, to which I refer the reader at this point.

[69]Heilman, p.153.

[70]Ibid., p.158.

[71]Ibid., p.229.

[72]Ibid., p.261.

[73]Ibid., p.266.

[74]Ibid., p.271.

[75]Gardner, p.4.

[76]Heilman, p.74.

[77]Ibid., p.221.

[78]Ibid., pp.286-7.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

[1]*The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p.11.

[2]Ibid., p.65.

[3]Ibid., p.64.

[4]Danby, p.15

[5]Haydn, p.67.

[6]Ibid., pp.139,42 and Danby, p.21.

[7]Danby, p.28.

[8]*Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: John Windett, [1594-] 1597), (facsimile edition, Menston, Eng.: Scolar Press, 1969), Bk. I, Ch. iii, p.4.

[9]Quoted in Danby, p.23.

[10]Haydn, p.653.

[11]Ibid., p.637.

[12]Ibid., pp.642-4.

[13]Danby, p.21.

[14]Haydn, p.644.

[15]Ibid., p.653.

[16]Ibid., p.643.

[17]Danby, p.129,125.

[18]Ibid., p.138.

[19]*The True Way to Virtue and Happiness*, trans. by Andrew Court in 3 Books ([London: B. Alsop for] T. Dewe, 1623).

[20]Haydn, pp.472-3.

[21]Essayes, trans. by John Florio, London: 1605, Everyman edition in 3 vol. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, [1935]), III, p.359.

[22]Ibid., III, p.204.

[23]Haydn, p.481.

[24]Discourses upon the First Decade of Titus Livius. trans, by E[dward] D[acres] (London: T. Paine for W. Hill and D. Pakeman, 1636), Book II, p.247.

[25]Haydn, p.441.

[26]Ibid., p.450.

[27]The Prince, trans. by W.H. Marriott, Everyman edition (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, [1908]), p.121.

[28]Discourses, Book III, p.494.

[29]Ibid., Book III, p.496.

[30]Danby, p.50.

[31]Ibid., p.51.

[32]Two Bookes of Constancie, trans. by Sir John Stradling, ed. by Rudolph Kirk (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, [1939]), pp.107-11. Also cited in Haydn, pp.529-31.

[33]Haydn, pp.525,527.

[34]It is interesting to note that Nashe, Hooker and Spenser are generally considered to be classic Renaissance humanists whereas Donne and Montaigne are outright proponents of the Counter-Renaissance.

[35]Haydn, p.533. See also Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), pp.127-68.

[36]G.B. Harrison discusses this fact as a means of dating King Lear in his Introduction to the play in The Complete Works, p.1136.

[37]Haydn, p.637.

[38]Ibid., p.638.

[39]The technique of the visual contradiction of humanist platitudes is explored at length in the article by H.A. Hargreaves, "Visual Contradictions in King Lear," Shakespeare Quarterly, 21 (1970), pp.491-5.

[40]Shakespeare's Tragic Justice, (London: Methuen n. d.), p.90.

[41]The scene in which this speech occurs is not present in the Folio version of King Lear.

[42]Haydn, p.650.

[43]Ibid., p.666.

[44]Judah Stampfer, "The Catharsis of King Lear," Shakespeare Survey 13 (1960), p.1.

[45]"Preface to Shakespeare," Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p.33.

[46]Introduction to King Lear (London: Heineman, 1904), p.ix.

[47]Weitz, Modern Language Review, 66,1,32. Italics mine.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Carmen Rogers, "Heavenly Justice in the Tragedies of Shakespeare," Studies in Shakespeare, ed. A.D. Matthews and C.M. Emery (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1953),pp.117,125.

[50]Stampfer, p.5.

[51]Shakespearean Tragedy, p.327.

[52]Judah Stampfer, "The Catharsis of King Lear," and J.K. Walton, "Lear's Last Speech," both in Shakespeare Survey, 13 (1960), pp.1-10 and 11-10 respectively. See also Carol L. Marks "'Speak What We Feel': The Ending of King Lear," ELH, 5 (1968), pp.163-71; Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p.78 and H.W. Donner, "'Is this the Promised End?': Reflections on the Tragic Ending of King Lear," English Studies 50, 5, pp.503-10.

[53]Marks, 164-5.

[54]Stampfer, p.2.

[55]Donner, p.510.

[56]Marks, p.167 and Stampfer, p.7.

[57]Haydn, p.645.

[58]The Folio assigns this speech to Edgar, but Harrison gives the speech to Albany on the authority of the earlier Quarto version of King Lear.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

[1]W.D. Niven, "Good and Evil," The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 12 vol. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), pp.318-26.

[2]Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, p.45.

[3]Aurelius Augustinius of Hippo, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans, trans. by Henry Bettenson with an Introduction by David Knowles ([Harmondsworth, England]: Penguin Books, [1972]), Book XIV, Ch.11.

[4]Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, trans. by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p.36.

[5]Vision of Tragedy, p.46. See also Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p.3 and Michel, p.428.

[6]Tragedy: A View of Life (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), p.4.

[7]Moira: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1944), p.97.

[8]Vision of Tragedy, p.46.

[9]Ibid., p.7.

[10]Greene, p.96.

[11]Sewall, p.78.

[12]Greene, p.91.

[13]Ibid., p.8.

[14]Sewall, p.47.

[15]Quoted in Sewall, ibid.

[16]Ibid., pp.4-5.

[17]Symbolism of Evil, pp.212,216.

[18]Ibid., p.211.

[19]Ibid., p.212.

[20]Ibid., p.213.

[21]The earliest and most influential rebuttal of the tragic theology may be found in Plato's Republic, where he states:

> God, since he is good, is not the cause of everything, as is commonly said; he is the cause of only a part of the things that happen to men... [Therefore] we will not allow the young to hear the words of Aeschylus: "God implants crime in men when he wishes to ruin their house completely." (Bk. II, 379c-380a)

The translation is Ricoeur's but it accords with that of other scholars, notably Benjamin Jowett, The Republic of Plato, 2 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), I.

[22]Ricoeur, p.217.

[23]The word "moira", in Greek tragedy, has many meanings, among them "fate", "lot", "share", "the gods" and "evil". Ibid., pp.215-7 and Green, Moira.

[24]Ricoeur, p.228.

[25]Ibid., p.220.

[26]Haydn, p.305.

[27]Ibid., p.306.

[28]Ricoeur, p.218.

[29]Shakespearean Tragedy, pp.303-4.

[30]"Unity of King Lear," p.157 and This Great Stage, p.37.

[31]Ricoeur, p.220.

[32]The Complete Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. by Edwin Greenlaw et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), VI, Book VII, Canto vii, Stanzas 5-6.

[33]Essayes, III, p.228.

[34]Quoted in Danby, p.23.

[35]Ecclesiastical Polity, Book I, Ch.iii, p.54.

[36]The Folio reads "will...join" at this point.

[37]The Folio reads "Sword" at this point.

[38]The scene in which this speech occurs is absent from the Folio version of the text.

[39]Ricoeur, p.225.

[40]Ibid., p.219.

[41]Ibid., p.230.

[42]Aeschylus, Agamemnon, ll. pp.186-8. The translation appears to be Ricoeur's, but the general sense of it accords with that of other scholars. For example, George Thomson's translation reads:

> He [Zeus] to wisdom leadeth man,
> He hath stablished firm the law,
> Man shall learn by suffering.

The Oresteia of Aeschylus, 2 vol. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), I, p.111.

[43]Ricoeur, p.227.

INDEX OF SECTION GLOSSES

Section Gloss	Page
Chapter I	
Scholarly Criticism On 'King Lear' May Be Said To Begin With A.C. Bradley's 'Shakespearean Tragedy', And Although It Contains Many Things With Which Scholars Now Disagree, Its Influence And Importance Cannot Be Ignored.	1
In Reaction To The Assertion That 'King Lear' Is Unstageable, Harley Granville-Barker Examines The Dramatic Aspects Of The Play And Argues For Its Place In The Canon Of The Stage.	4
The Character Of Lear Is Frequently Examined In Respect To The Self-Knowledge He Acquires Through Suffering And In Respect To His Resultant Spiritual Regeneration.	8
The Most Substantial Rebuttal To The Neo-Christian Interpretations Of 'King Lear' Is W.R. Elton's "'King Lear' And The Gods", In Which He Argues That The Background Of Religious Thought In 'King Lear' Is Ostensibly Pagan.	11
There Is A Subtle Shade Of Sarcasm In The Title Of Barbara Everett's Article, "The New King Lear" For She Clearly Considers The "New" 'King Lear' To Be Notably Inferior To The "Old" 'King Lear'.	18
Robert B. Heilman Examines The Patterns Of Imagery In 'King Lear' And How They Combine To Produce The Play's Major Theme--The Ways Of Looking At And Assessing The World Of Human Experience.	
Chapter II	
Elizabethan Writers Saw In Their World The Operation Of Antithetical Forces, The Presence Of Which They Frequently Acknowledged Within A Single Literary Work.	29
'King Lear' Dramatizes The Various Meanings Of The Word "Nature", The Most Prominent Of Which Is The Renaissance Humanist Usage Of The Word To Indicate "The Visible	

Creation Regarded As An Orderly, [Benign] Arrangement" Which Emanates From God. 32

In Opposition To The Christian Humanists Of The Renaissance Stand Those Thinkers Committed To Various Shades Of Naturalism. These Men Variously Deny The Validity Of Humanist Idealism And Consider Reason And Nature As Diametrical Opposites. 38

There Are Several Passages In 'King Lear' Which Indicate That The Universal Order Embodied In The Drama Is Not Merely "Out Of Joint" But That It Is, In Fact, Decaying Completely And Coming To An End. 43

The Presence Of Evil, In The Shape Of The Machiavellian Naturalists, Induces The Stoics To Re-Assess Their World View, And Finally Come To Question The Very Existence Of Divine Justice. 47

Whatever The Government Of The Universe In 'King Lear', It Is Definitely Not Guided By The Princple Of Punishment And Destruction For The Wicked, And Prosperity And Preservation For The Good. 50

The Apparent Indifference Of The Divine Hierarchy Toward The Actions Of Goneril And Regan Becomes The Point Of Inception For Lear's Metaphysical Investigation Of The Human Condition. 54

In Spite Of The Events In The First Scene Of Act V, Where Lear And Cordelia Are Joyfully Re-United, The Final Comment On The Themes Of Justice And Decay, And On The Character Of The Universe, Must Surely Be Made By The Final Catastrophic Scene Of The Play. 58

Chapter III

The Crux Of Lear's Dilemma Lies In The Orthodox Humanist Belief That The Natural Order Emanates From The Gods. 65

The Significance Of The Word "Evil" Varies According To The Context In Which It Is Used: "Evil", Therefore, Is A Term Which Constantly Requires Defining. 67

Most Critics Agree That The Conflict Between Good And Evil Is Crucial For Tragedy: And Of The Two, Evil Is More Important Than Good In The Tragic Vision Of Existence For, As Richard B. Sewall Observes, The Idea Of Evil Informs All Tragedy. 70

"The Tragic Vision Of The World," Says Paul Ricoeur, "Is Tied To A Spectacle And Not To A Speculation" For The Essence Of The Tragic Resists Transcription Into A Theory Since "The Tragic Myth Tends To Concentrate Good And Evil At The Summit Of The Divine." 73

In 'King Lear', All Of The Characters Are Involved In A Conflict With Evil, But It Is Lear Who Finally Becomes Aware Of Ricoeur's Tragic Paradox. 78

If Lear Can See Evil Existing Within The Natural Order, Then By A Natural Progression, He Must Eventually Consider That Evil Emanates From The Gods Themselves. 84

"Is The Tragic Theology Thinkable? The Tragic Drama Does Not Work It Out Reflectively; It Exhibits It By Means Of The Characters In A Spectacle, In The Vestments Of Poetry, And Through The Specific Emotions Of Terror And Pity. 91

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